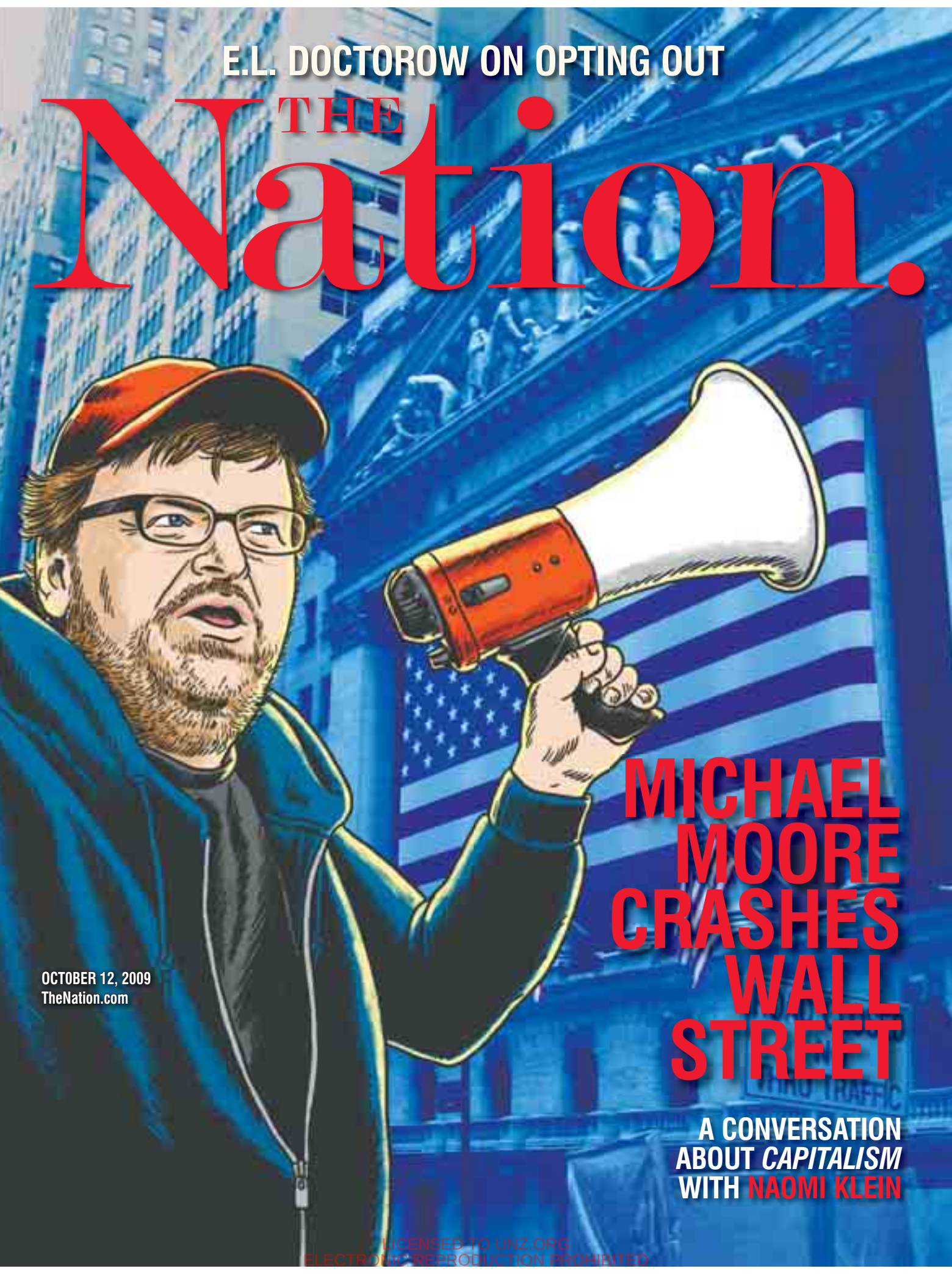
E.L. DOCTOROW ON OPTING OUT

THE Nation.



MICHAEL MOORE CRASHES WALL STREET

A CONVERSATION ABOUT *CAPITALISM* WITH NAOMI KLEIN

OCTOBER 12, 2009
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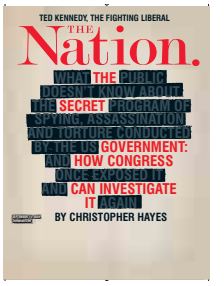
Letters


TED KENNEDY, THE FIGHTING LIBERAL
THE
Nation.
WHAT THE PUBLIC DOESN'T KNOW ABOUT THE SECRET PROGRAM OF SPYING, ASSASSINATION AND TORTURE CONDUCTED BY THE US GOVERNMENT: AND HOW CONGRESS ONCE EXPOSED IT AND CAN INVESTIGATE IT AGAIN
BY CHRISTOPHER HAYES

Adoption: Giving It All Away?

SEATTLE
Kathryn Joyce got it right in "Shotgun Adoption" [Sept. 14]. I am a partial victim of the crisis pregnancy centers. As a young unwed mother with no outside support, I turned to New Hope here in Seattle. They counseled me with one option: an open adoption so my son would have a life I couldn't provide. But the "open adoption/access to my son/co-parenting" was essentially a closed adoption. What I found out later was I had *no* legal rights to my son.

My life has been full, varied, abundant and challenging, but this by far has been the hardest aspect to reconcile. I am grateful for the work of many brave people who speak the truth of the deep loss, guilt and shame that we birth mothers involved with adoption experience.
JACQUELINE MARCELL

FALLS CHURCH, VA.
We at Origins-USA thank you for the thorough and insightful "Shotgun Adoption." It goes a long way toward educating the public on what's really going on in many adoption businesses. Antiabortion Christian groups, however, are not the only organizations that use trickery to induce vulnerable young women to surrender their babies. I gave up my son in 1990 to a nonreligious nonprofit that similarly used "counseling" to pressure mothers into adoption. I was strongly dissuaded from any attempt to keep my baby and constantly told to think of adoption surrender as my only option. Origins-USA (origins-usa.org), a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation led by mothers who have lost children to adoption, advocates for the natural right of mothers to nurture their children and for keeping families together.
BERNADETTE WRIGHT

REDMOND, WASH.
Kathryn Joyce gave a good description of unwanted pregnancy in the "Baby Scoop Era" (1945-73). I am a birth mother; my son was born in 1969. It has affected me, and others around me, my whole life. Thank you for putting into print what the public never hears about adoption.
DOROTHY FISCHER

PHILADELPHIA
As the Pennsylvania chair of the Republican Majority for Choice, I have heard countless tales of crisis pregnancy centers and the tactics they use to shame and manipulate women. Women in these situations should be supported no matter the choice they make, and extremists manipulating their vulnerability for profit is disgusting. These organizations and the horror stories they produce may scare women into not considering adoption. It is clear that legislation should be enacted nationally, protecting women from organizations that not only deceive but rob them of their rights as women and mothers.
KAREN CHIZECK

GAINESVILLE, FLA.
It was so sad to hear that there are women being coerced to choose adoption for their children when they prefer to parent. As an adoptive parent and member of an adoptive parent support group, I know that none of us would ever want to have any part in a situation like that. We desire to be parents, but not at the cost of a woman being coerced.
SARAH HAMERSMA

NEWARK, DELA.
Thank you so much for your outstanding article on crisis pregnancy centers. It makes me furious to read about these charlatans who trade in human beings. I am 64; my birth mother is 81, and we both are still suffering the traumatic consequences of adoption.

Single women who want to carry their pregnancy to term need to understand that a reputable group will tell them about the government programs that are in place to assist them if they choose to raise their child themselves. They also need to know that they will never forget the child they relinquish and that the pain of relinquishing will be with

(continued on page 24)

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A White Hot Season

An ugly streak of racism stained the right wing's summer of hate. It is plain to see in the posters of Barack Obama dressed as an African witch doctor above the slogan OBAMACARE: COMING SOON TO A CLINIC NEAR YOU, and it is evident in conspiracy theories that question Obama's place of birth and presidential legitimacy. But did it prompt Congressman Joe Wilson to scream, "You lie!" when Obama said his healthcare plan would not cover illegal immigrants? Is it manifested in the paranoid rants against "death panels" and "Obama-style socialism"?

EDITORIAL

Of course it is. But how much so, and why, are harder questions to answer—as former President Carter discovered when he ignited a firestorm by saying that "an overwhelming portion of the intensely demonstrated animosity toward President Barack Obama is based on the fact that he is a black man." Carter's heart was in the right place, but his formulation suggests that racism can be quantified and that it is largely a matter of individual prejudice—an accusation that can be plausibly denied by anyone not in the KKK. Hence, pundits like David Brooks stressed the populist roots of right-wing rage, and the White House and GOP chair Michael Steele now agree on one thing: opposition to Obama's reform agenda is based on policy differences, not racism. But racism also expresses itself as policy, from legal segregation to states' rights, and if racism does not constitute the totality of antigovernment populism, it is not incidental to it.

Who knows what lurks in the heart of Joe Wilson? In the end, what matters is that after the outburst, Senator Max Baucus, at the request of the White House, tightened existing bars on illegal immigrants' buying health coverage in his proposed insurance exchange and established an immigration-status verification requirement that could make it harder for *legal* immigrants to get healthcare. That policy result is racist, even if no one involved in crafting it harbors a hatred of Latinos; it is also xenophobic, financially inefficient and a public health nightmare.

Whatever agendas lie behind the right wing's summer smears, one discernibly consistent goal has been to shrink the power of people of color and the organizations that represent them and to tar the pursuit of racial justice as anti-American, foreign and unconstitutional. It was not so much Sonia Sotomayor's "wise Latina" remark that made her a target of the right; it was her moderate support for considering race as one factor in legal decisions, a principle Chief Justice John Roberts and right-wing legal groups like the Committee for Justice, which led the assault on Sotomayor, have done much to extinguish.

Likewise, although it was Van Jones's signature on a 9/11 Truth petition that brought him down, it was his work with Color of Change, an organization that "attempts to strengthen Black America's voice," that placed him in the cross hairs of Glenn Beck, whose Fox show has lost seventy-one advertisers in the wake of a Color of Change–led boycott. And although the witch hunt against ACORN has recently reached all the way to Congress, which voted to deny the group funding in the wake of a manufactured scandal (see Christopher Hayes, page 4), it was years ago that Karl Rove put ACORN on the GOP's enemies list. Why? Because ACORN's registration drives increase turnout of poor, black and brown voters.

Obama has always defined himself as a president who just happens to be black, and whatever the necessity of that definition, it prevents him from leading the pushback on these racist attacks. But

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News & Analysis

Barbara Crossette: Obama goes to the UN

Sharon Lerner: Abortion coverage in healthcare reform

Frederika Randall: Berlusconi—poised for downfall?

Slide Show: The far-right fringe

Audio: Naomi Klein's full interview with Michael Moore

Blogs: Michael Moore's *Capitalism: A Love Story*

Calendar: Post your event

there's no reason we can't. Pursuing a more just, less racist society is, after all, a defining difference between the American left and the American right, which began the 1950s denouncing the civil rights movement as a communist plot and has failed to embrace racial justice as a cause ever since. It now seems to have hooked its future to targeting the political life of minorities by recycling McCarthyism, from conspiracy theories to guilt-by-association to distorting the statements and records of public servants.

It might be impossible to divine the prejudice nursed by those mounting the recent attacks, but it is possible, and indeed urgent, to unmask and confront their motives and to stand strong for the rights of people of color to exercise and expand their power.

ACORN and Accountability

With the notable exception of handing over $700 billion to Wall Street last year, the United States Congress is not known for quick, decisive action. But recently, in a resounding bipartisan vote, members of both houses voted to deny federal dollars to the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now. Over the past fifteen years, ACORN and its affiliates have received on average about $3.5 million a year from the government, or approximately one-millionth of this year's budget.

The votes came just a few days after the release of a series of (now infamous) videos in which young right-wing activists James O'Keefe and Hannah Giles pose as a pimp and a prostitute. They take a hidden camera to a number of ACORN tax preparation offices around the country seeking tax and business advice. (Why a pimp and prostitute? Who the hell knows. Neither answered my request for an interview.)

The undercover duo provoked responses from ACORN staff that ranged from the unconscionable (an employee in Baltimore reacting to O'Keefe's plan to bring in thirteen Salvadoran girls as prostitutes with the suggestion he claim some as dependents) to the obviously sketchy (a Brooklyn tax adviser suggesting the couple put their cash profits in a can and bury it in the backyard) to the praiseworthy (the ACORN offices in Philadelphia called the cops and filed a police report)—O'Keefe and Giles haven't seen fit to post that tape. Mostly, though, the tapes are a testament to what might be called the Borat Effect: human beings' intense socialization to be helpful and not rock the boat, even when confronted with someone doing something objectionable, outrageous or preposterous.

But if the disconcerting contents of the videos were the proximate cause of ACORN's Congressional rebuke, it is the organization's mission that made it a target. Since the 1970s, ACORN has committed itself steadfastly to building power for poor people. "Unlike almost any other institution on the left," a former organizer told me, "they constantly gravitate toward the most fucked-over people." Not surprisingly, this makes America's right wing furious. O'Keefe says he was inspired to pull the stunt after watching a video that showed ACORN engaging in civil disobedience by breaking the padlock on a foreclosed home and escorting its locked-out owner inside. The video,

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O'Keefe told the *Washington Post*, made him "upset."

For the past several years, reactionaries of every stripe have waged a relentless campaign aimed at delegitimizing ACORN, and the organization's manifold dysfunctions have given them a steady stream of ammunition. "When I was working for them we'd hired all these low-income people, and we couldn't even get them their paychecks on time," another former ACORN organizer told me. "We were losing really good employees. It comes from this place where there's so much work to do, we don't do logistics because there's always a crisis. But logistics matter."

Last year news broke that the brother of Wade Rathke, who founded ACORN, had embezzled nearly $1 million. Rathke didn't disclose it to the board. The revelations precipitated a change in management and a much-needed self-evaluation, a process formalized by ACORN's announcement that former Massachusetts Attorney General Scott Harshbarger will "lead an independent inquiry into the organizational systems and processes surrounding the social services of the organization."

For all its organizational problems, ACORN does vital, indispensable, unglamorous work: it trains legions of organizers, builds grassroots leadership and wages disciplined and effective local and statewide campaigns, such as its minimum-wage effort in Florida in 2004.

But it is hardly the colossus of right-wing mythology. For proof of ACORN's meager influence, one need only look at the swift action by Congress to cut off its funding and compare that to the fate of other government contractors under a cloud of far more damning revelations. Like, for instance, Blackwater. As my colleague Jeremy Scahill has reported, a recent federal audit suggests that Blackwater may owe the government $55 million allegedly for failing to meet the terms of just one of its federal contracts. Five of its employees face murder charges for their role in the massacre of Iraqi civilians in Baghdad's Nisour Square. Yet Blackwater's $217 million security contract in Iraq was just extended indefinitely by the Obama administration. Or consider former Halliburton subsidiary KBR, which received $80 million in contract bonuses to provide electrical wiring in Iraq; so far, sixteen soldiers and two contractors have died from electrocution from that wiring, precipitating a comprehensive Defense Department review. And in what was perhaps the most buried news story of the summer, there was pharmaceutical giant Pfizer's $2.3 billion fraud settlement with the Justice Department for its illegal promotion of painkiller Bextra and other drugs. According to fedspending.org, Pfizer had more than $73 million in federal contracts in 2007 alone.

But the government contracts of Blackwater, KBR and Pfizer remain intact. (In a delicious bit of irony, the legislation defunding ACORN was written so broadly that Representative Alan Grayson and the Project on Government Oversight have compiled a list of firms they say fit the defunding criteria, and it reads like a Who's Who of the military-industrial complex.)

The disparity in the treatment of Blackwater et al. and ACORN is part of a larger American problem, what might be called the Inequality of Accountability. We diligently apply the principle of accountability to the poor and the powerless, and the principle of forgiveness to the wealthy and powerful.

Even before it was punked by a couple of right-wing twenty-somethings, nobody knew that better than ACORN.

After all, their members see it every day. CHRISTOPHER HAYES

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

A Grand Jury Investigates John Edwards

When tempted, he proved not equipped
To simply keep his trousers zipped.
The cover-up, among its flaws,
Might well have broken campaign laws.
A secret baby with a chick'll
Quite often put one in a pickle.

Nader's Road to Utopia

Not content to foment a consumer revolution, to start up policy-action groups like Public Citizen, to write and publish a string of investigative reports and, oh yes, to run for president, Ralph Nader has written a novel—his first. The title is *Only the Super-Rich Can Save Us!*

If you're thinking the peerless organizer of popular movements has sold out to the big bucks people, well, the book is fiction, see. It's the story of social upheaval catalyzed by a team of progressive-minded billionaires. As Nader tersely explained to me: "Reform can only happen top down–bottom up. Not bottom up alone. You've got to have the big boys to take on the big boys." You need money to make change.

COMMENT

The protagonists in Nader's novel are seventeen elderly billionaires who invest their fortunes to bring about a more just and humane America. As you've probably guessed, this is a utopian novel. Why utopian? Having seen so many worthy nonfiction muckraking books ignored, Nader says, he decided fiction would be a better way to draw attention to his ideas. He also felt that the honorable tradition of utopian novels (*Looking Backward*, *A Traveler From Altruria*, *News From Nowhere*, *Walden Two*, *Always Coming Home*) had fallen into desuetude. In their day, such fictions inspired concerned citizens with powerful alternative visions. But in the 1950s the genre came under attack by conservative academics and ideologues, who charged that socialist utopias were a fast track to totalitarianism (see Russell Jacoby's *The End of Utopia* for details). Also, reformers lost confidence in their dreams.

Of course, the right has its utopian novels. Witness the continuing popularity of Ayn Rand's tracts *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* (the latter has sold 300,000 copies so far this year, presumably to Glenn Beckheads arming themselves to resist Obama "socialism").

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For his progressive purposes Nader finds that the utopian novel allows one's imagination to forage freely in policy pastures for down-to-earth solutions. "There's a utopian novel in every civic practitioner," he says. Meaning: political activists who know a lot about social problems and solutions can fruitfully imagine fictional scenarios of how they would be achieved. In the past Nader might have sat down and written an investigative book. Now he is presenting his ideas as fiction grounded in reality.

Nader's novel differs from traditional futuristic utopias in that his seems to be set in a vague, pre-Obama present; also, it

Noted.

GOLDSTONE REPORTS: The UN Human Rights Council report on the December–January Gaza conflict, released recently on the eve of **Barack Obama**'s attempt to jump-start comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, was but the latest in a series of investigations, most of them by human rights organizations. Like its predecessors, the so-called Goldstone report, named after chief investigator **Richard Goldstone**, is devastating in its critique of Israeli actions: indiscriminate use of firepower; deliberate attacks on civilians and civilian structures, including hospitals, schools, mosques and water plants; use of human shields; abusive treatment of detainees; imposition of a blockade on Gaza before and after the attack itself. The report concludes that Israel violated international humanitarian law, committed "grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention in respect of wilful killings and wilfully causing great suffering to protected persons," and war crimes, possibly even crimes against humanity. Courageous Israeli journalist **Gideon Levy** summed it up well in *Ha'aretz*: it was "an unrestrained assault on a besieged, totally unprotected civilian population which showed almost no signs of resistance during this operation."

Predictably, the Goldstone report was met with a wave of angry denunciations from the Israeli government—which had refused to cooperate with the investigators—and most of the Israeli press. The mainstream media in Israel have downplayed the report's significance; news coverage has been sparse, and not one major US daily has seen fit to editorialize on it. US pundits and politicians—including UN Ambassador **Susan Rice**, who called it "unbalanced, one-sided and basically unacceptable"—have been overwhelmingly critical.

But it's not so easy to dismiss these findings. For one thing, the nearly 600-page report is carefully documented and comprehensive, based on field visits, public hearings, almost 200 individual interviews, photos and satellite imagery, and a review of more than 300 other reports. For another, Goldstone is one of the most respected and experienced international jurists, having served as a justice on South Africa's Constitutional Court and chief UN prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

And then there are Goldstone's personal connections: he's Jewish and, according to his daughter, herself an ardent Zionist, he's "a Zionist and loves Israel." Indeed, she said of her father, who serves on the Board of Governors of Hebrew University, "I know that if he thought what he did would not somehow be for the sake of peace for everyone in Israel or that it would have hindered such efforts, he would not have accepted the job."

Before taking the job, Goldstone insisted on expanding the mission's mandate so that it would cover Palestinian acts. Far from being one-sided, the report concluded that Hamas rocket and mortar barrages on southern Israel were "indiscriminate attacks upon the civilian population," acts that "would constitute war crimes and may amount to crimes against humanity." International law expert (and *Nation* editorial board member) **Richard Falk** has concluded that "no credible international commission could reach any set of conclusions other than those reached by the Goldstone Report on the central allegations."

Falk points out that there are good reasons for Israel's panicked reaction. Goldstone recommends that Israel and Hamas carry out serious, comprehensive investigations of their own into the alleged crimes, and that if they do not do so within six months, the **UN Security Council** should consider referring the matter to the **International Criminal Court** in The Hague. That's highly unlikely, given US veto power on the Security Council. But the report will further diminish Israel's reputation and will probably strengthen the growing international boycott, divestment and sanctions movement. In his column on the report, Levy darkly concludes, "On the eve of the Jewish New Year, Israel, deservedly, is becoming an outcast and detested country. We must not forget it for a minute." ROANE CAREY

FCC BACKS NET NEUTRALITY: It is not often that the chairman of the **Federal Communications Commission** makes a historic announcement. But FCC chair **Julius Genachowski** did just that on September 21, when he proposed "net neutrality" rules that should preserve a free and open Internet. For years, grassroots groups have squared off against telecommunications giants over the question of whether the government would allow service providers to discriminate against certain websites and applications that cannot pay them for faster service and easier access. Genachowski wants to prevent the information superhighway from becoming a toll road. And all indications are that he has the votes—his own and those of FCC commissioners **Michael Copps** and **Mignon Clyburn**—to enshrine net neutrality protections and defend what has been called "the Internet's first amendment."

The battle to define whether any new medium will operate in the public interest or as a fresh "profit center" for old-media corporations is invariably won or lost when the technologies are young. The public interest won in Britain when a muscular BBC was developed at the dawn of the radio age; it lost in the United States when the airwaves were handed off to commercial interests that eventually used their economic and political power to gut federal rules and regulations designed to serve the public. Thanks to Genachowski and the FCC majority, it looks like the good guys will have a real say in defining the quality and character of a new medium. JOHN NICHOLS

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describes the process of successful change rather than the new world that results (success being utopian for the left). And the seventeen billionaires in the novel are named after real-life superrich folk and their character traits are drawn from the counterpart's biography. The ring leader is the Daddy Megabucks of them all, Warren Buffett, whom Nader imagines being radicalized by the suffering in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. He ships food and medicine to the victims and then travels to the scene to direct rescue efforts. When an old lady cries out, "Only the rich can save us!" he has an epiphany: he will enlist progressive billionaires to rain money on the American desert of indifference.

So he recruits a team of power hitters, including George Soros, Ted Turner, Ross Perot, Barry Diller, Bill Cosby, Yoko Ono and others. At secret meetings at a five-star resort in Maui they plot a host of citizen-action programs to tackle the problems of dirty elections, paid-for politicians, corporate arrogance, dysfunctional schools—and down the list. Then they put their "dead money" to good work, supporting an armada of citizen groups with names like Citizens' Utility Board, People's Chamber of Commerce, National Trust for Posterity and Congress Watchdogs, which implement smart reforms. There's a Clean Elections Party, which runs third-party candidates, and Sun God demos for green energy. Individuals form themselves into Delaware corporations, with all the excessive privileges of corporate personhood. And oh yes, another group unionizes Wal-Mart by setting up competing stores on decaying Main Streets.

Well, as the man says, it's a utopia. You gotta believe.

RICHARD LINGEMAN

Lowballing Health Reform

COMMENT

Many progressives were disappointed that President Obama failed to take a nonnegotiable stand for a public health insurance option during his speech to a joint session of Congress on September 9. Less noticed was the fact that he dropped the target cost of the reform package 10 percent, to $900 billion, from the $1 trillion Congress had been aiming for. But this difference should greatly alarm those who care about providing all Americans with healthcare coverage.

When it comes to this debate, size does matter: within the framework Congress is pursuing, money trimmed from a package will mean lower subsidies, weaker coverage and fewer people with affordable care. And that will be true even if progressive legislators manage to win the increasingly uphill battle for some form of a public option.

The most important fight right now, as the Senate Finance Committee is considering an anemic proposal from its chair, Max Baucus, is to ensure that Congress spends the amount necessary to make coverage affordable. This plan clears Obama's $900 billion threshold—unlike the $1 trillion proposal pending in the House—but its savings come at a cost to modest-income Americans, especially those who do not get insurance from their employers. Baucus accepted some amendments to his initial proposal to make care modestly more affordable. But limiting the cost to $900 billion makes it impossible to provide adequate assistance to those who cannot afford care. They will be required to buy coverage at higher rates, and their policies will still leave them vulnerable to exorbitant out-of-pocket costs. According to an analysis by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the House would ask a family of three with a household income of $24,352 to pay only 1.5 percent of their income in premiums. With help from federal subsidies, that $365 would buy them insurance that would cover 97 percent of typical health costs. (They would pay the remainder from their own pocket.)

That is still a financial burden for families near poverty, but it is a lot more manageable than what Senator Baucus has proposed. Even as amended, his bill would require families near the poverty level to pay more than twice as much for insurance. That $889 each year buys a policy that covers only 90 percent of typical health costs. Their out-of-pocket expenses would be capped, but at almost $4,000. Altogether, these near-poor families could wind up spending around 20 percent of their income on healthcare in a single year.

And if the near-poor would fare badly, the middle class would be squeezed even harder without adequate subsidies. Families of three living between 300 and 400 percent of the federal poverty level—$54,930 to $73,240—would be required to pay up to 12 percent of their income for policies that cover only 70 percent of typical costs, and they could still face additional out-of-pocket costs totaling nearly $8,000. A family at the low end of this bracket could wind up paying almost $15,000 in a single year, or more than one-quarter of their income. The bill exempts people from the mandate if they can't find a plan that costs less than 10 percent of their income—but since it doesn't provide enough support, the result is that, according to the Congressional Budget Office, millions would remain uninsured. When it costs so much to buy such limited coverage, families on tight budgets may not agree with Congress that they can afford to spend 10 percent of their income on premiums alone. And those who cannot scrape together the money to buy insurance will be fined.

In addition, even wealthier Americans who could afford to spend 10 percent of their income on premiums won't be guaranteed an affordable plan under Baucus's proposal. True, insurance companies would no longer be able to charge more for those with pre-existing conditions, but older Americans not yet old enough to quality for Medicare could face premiums costing several times as much as the cheapest plans in their part of the country. They would not be fined for going without insurance, but they would still be uninsured.

Health reform is, at least in part, about equity—no one should go without care because of an inability to pay, nor should families be impoverished by illness. Fortunately, there's a relatively easy and nonideological fix for the shortcomings in a plan like this: spend more on subsidies. Even Republican Senator Olympia Snowe has raised concerns about the stinginess of Baucus's original proposal. The bill shows why the president's $900 billion suggestion is too low, and Congress should disregard any cap imposed for political reasons if it stands in the way of making coverage affordable to all Americans.

J. LESTER FEDER

J. Lester Feder is a freelance journalist based in Washington, DC.

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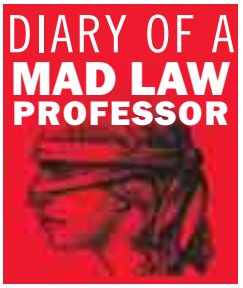
Patricia J. Williams

Voice of America?

The cover of the September 28 *New York* magazine has a picture of President Obama's face overlaid with the suddenly common currency of our "national debate": PARASITE-IN-CHIEF. HITLER. LIAR. IMPOSTOR. STALIN. NAZI. SOCIALIST. MUSLIM. KENYA-BORN.

That these labels are incoherent is clearly not what matters. That they are untrue means even less. The president's Christianity is no match for the power of his imaginary Muslim doppelgänger. What the healthcare bill actually says is much less exciting than the fantasy of Grandma's last gurgle as she is tossed into the tumbrel. Official documentation of Obama's citizenship and place of birth means nothing to those who apparently need to have seen it before they'll believe it. (As one commentator on the Drudge Report wrote in a parody of birthers: "We also demand a mason jar filled with the actual afterbirth, a copy of the birth filmed in HD, satellite imagery of the hospital, a record of the comings and goings of both parents from the moment of conception to birth, and a sworn statement from G-d. Is that really too much to ask for?") That the president pursues solidly centrist economic policies is of no import to those who entertain themselves scribbling little mustaches on his portraits.



It is clear that common notions of reality are not what motivate or inform the rabidly hateful calls for revolt that have overtaken our national discourse. By no measure of the real world is Obama evil or a mass murderer or an "alien" or even just a socialist. As Barney Frank put it—on what planet do these people spend most of their time?

The answer to that, of course, means taking a serious look at the narrative worlds created by Fox News and AM radio, where Rush Limbaugh and Glenn Beck are the reigning kings. This is a world in which the president is not really American. The presidency has been stolen. The president does not believe in a Christian God. He takes his orders from a cave in Afghanistan. He wants to take away your guns, impoverish your children and kill your elders. If this balloon of fear were not bad enough, it's supplemented by repeated calls to "retake" America, to "regain" a golden past, to "revolt" against the kleptocracy.

This is not the kind of speech that can be shrugged off by calling for "more speech." And no, I am not suggesting censorship. But I do think we need to take the growing power of this fear-fueled, alternative, imaginary universe more seriously. It has consequences for the physical world in which our real bodies reside. If one really believes that Obama is the Antichrist, then one goes out and starts arming oneself; and violence directed against those perceived as less than all-American begins to be justified as "preemptive" self-defense.

We know that incendiary media can foment terrible consequences. We all know that Stalin propagandized against "counter-revolutionary infiltrators." Similarly, Goebbels used mass media to incite resentments against Poles, Jews and "friends of the left," coolly trading on fears that German civilization was being debased, its government overtaken by "parasites" and "degenerates" and that true Germans must defend themselves against such forces or be annihilated. "It is not propaganda's task to be intelligent," he once observed. Rather, "its task is to lead to success."

My point is not to compare birthers and tea baggers to Goebbels—there's been enough of that ping-pong already. So lest the Nazi example evoke more than I mean, there are plenty of more recent instances. Argentina leading up to the junta, for example. Or Rwanda, where Human Rights Watch has documented how well-coordinated radio broadcasts systematically created the illusion that the Tutsi minority were internal traitors; gave out lists of names to be targeted; and instructed Hutus to "kill them before they kill you." Yet Radio-Television Libre des Milles-Collines, one of the most bilious stations, also aired good music and lively interviews with ordinary folk, populist chatter that sounded like "a conversation among Rwandans who knew each other well and were relaxing over some banana beer or a bottle of Primus." The poison was packaged appealingly, and as the killing escalated, radio talking heads vaunted it all as "self-defense." As then-commander of the UN peacekeeping force, Roméo Dallaire, put it, "replacing [the broadcasts] with messages of peace and reconciliation would have had a significant impact on the course of events."

Professor Frank Chalk, of the Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies, has documented some of the ingredients that can tip a society from expressive speech into excessive fulmination and then into full-scale repression or violence. They include: demonization of an identified or target audience, accusations of treason and blaming one's neighbors or leaders for conspiring or sympathizing with foreign enemies. In addition, the media can exploit "widespread perception that a crisis exists…a public with little knowledge of the situation from other sources of information…and a deep-seated habit of obeying authority among the target audience."

I know this will be misread, so let me underscore my meaning. I am not urging censorship. As Professor Chalk points out, mass media can be just as easily used to spread the messages of human rights. Nor am I without a sense of proportion: I do not believe we are on the cusp of chaos or genocide. Rather, I'm concerned about what Argentine journalist Jacobo Timerman described as "a bad hangover of [a] bygone period, and a forewarning that these hangovers still prevail and can recur, time and again." I do believe, therefore, that it is high time we all anticipate and grapple lucidly with the sustained, long-term effect of crazy proselytizing by Glenn Beck, Lou Dobbs and Rush Limbaugh. Their influence is growing, not waning. They represent a force that resorts to dehumanizing neighbors, fellow citizens and, in the embodiment of President Obama, the American Dream. ■

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Eric Alterman

The House That Irving Built

The Jewish intellectuals who came of age in the 1950s mostly began their lives as Trotskyists and evolved into liberals of a peculiarly conservative sort. (Lest this sound snide, I'd apply the same label to myself.) And while the reasons for this transformation were—like everything relating to what Norman Podhoretz called "the family"—complicated and multifaceted, at the center of the transformation was the phenomenon of McCarthyism. The success of so coarse and unsophisticated a demagogue as McCarthy, together with what they had witnessed regarding Stalin and Hitler, led most of these ex-Marxists to question the wisdom and efficacy of ideology in general and mass movements in particular.

Alone among his cacophonous crowd, Irving Kristol spoke sympathetically of the junior senator from Wisconsin. In the March 1952 issue of *Commentary*, he (infamously) argued, "For there is one thing that the American people know about Senator McCarthy: he, like them, is unequivocally anti-Communist." He added, "About the spokesmen for American liberalism, they feel they know no such thing."

Many people have commented on the philosophical inconsistencies that have permeated Kristol's thought over the decades. Paul Starr did a masterful job of laying these out in a 1995 *New Republic* review. Particularly shocking was Kristol's apparent embrace of the merits of Christian discrimination against Jews in his 1991 essay "The Future of American Jewry." "If America is going to become more Christian, Jews will have to adapt," he wrote. What's more, Kristol reassured his *landsleit*, this wouldn't be so bad. Sure, in the past "it created hurdles, but not impossible barriers" and would cut down on Jews intermarrying to boot. Equally amazing, in its own way, was Kristol's admission that he did not understand the first thing about supply-side economics, despite his constant promotion of it. "I was not certain of its economic merits but quickly saw its political possibilities," he wrote in 1995. Unlike more orthodox "naysaying" conservative economic doctrines, supply-side "offered neoconservatism" a plethora of goodies without the inconvenience of finding a way to pay for them.

Such philosophical contradictions melt away, however, when one realizes that Kristol was not motivated by ideas in the manner of, say, Isaiah Berlin or Leo Strauss. Rather, neoconservatism's "godfather" was driven by a single passion, and it was the same one that animated Senator McCarthy: hatred of American liberalism. He was forthright about this. It was not communism that inspired his primary animus during the cold war but "the fundamental assumptions of contemporary liberalism that were my enemy." His primary goal, therefore, "was to create a new majority, which evidently would mean a conservative majority, which came to mean, in turn, a Republican majority."

I wrote ten years ago that "more than anyone alive, perhaps, Irving Kristol can take the credit for reversing the direction of American political culture." The means by which this was accomplished are not widely understood. Kristol's contributions were threefold: first, in his writings he provided useful arguments for politicians who sought to discredit liberals and increase the power of corporations and wealthy individuals. Second, he solicited and distributed the financial contributions of many of these same corporations and wealthy individuals into institutions designed to perpetuate these same ideas and arguments. And finally, with his wife, conservative historian Gertrude Himmelfarb, he raised a son, William Kristol, who went on to extend and deepen these achievements, operating in much the same fashion, albeit in a far more congenial—that is, anti-liberal—atmosphere.

Irving Kristol's sophisticated, multifront war against liberalism succeeded well beyond anything achieved by the drunken hayseed McCarthy. He helped provide the (slender) ideological ballast for Reaganism via his promotion of supply-side economics in *The Public Interest*, which he co-founded and co-edited, and the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page, where he regularly appeared and with whose editor, Robert Bartley, he regularly consulted. So too, the ideas promoted a decade and a half later in the so-called Gingrich revolution. The former House Speaker said after Kristol's passing on September 18 that "Our Republican 'Contract With America' in 1994 was in many ways built on Kristol's insights." But far more important than the ideas themselves was the intellectual infrastructure—the think tanks, the magazines, the op-ed pages and the conferences—that Kristol helped build to provide support for arguments that otherwise would have been considered banal, dangerous or both. Kristol paid inadvertent tribute to his own achievement when, in moving from New York to Washington in 1988, he explained, "Today Washington seems to give birth to a new think tank every other month or so." It took liberals nearly four decades to realize what they were up against.

To those who point out that William Kristol is both more conservative and better known than his father, this is largely due to his good fortune in having been born into—politically, culturally and ideologically—the House That Irving Built. One factor, however, has remained constant for father and son: their eagerness to embrace the tactics of McCarthyism against their liberal opponents. Paying a kind of backhanded tribute to his father some fifty years after his notorious *Commentary* article, Kristol the Younger attacked the (briefly) wavering Iraq War supporter Richard Gephardt in hauntingly familiar terms in the *Washington Post*: "The American people, whatever their doubts about aspects of Bush's foreign policy, know that Bush is serious about fighting terrorists and terrorist states that mean America harm. About Bush's Democratic critics, they know no such thing." ■

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‘AMERICA’S TEACHER’

A CONVERSATION WITH MICHAEL MOORE ABOUT *CAPITALISM: A LOVE STORY*

by NAOMI KLEIN

On September 17, in the midst of the publicity blitz for his cinematic takedown of the capitalist order, Moore talked with Nation *columnist Naomi Klein by phone about the film, the roots of our economic crisis and the promise and peril of the present political moment. For a podcast of the interview, go to TheNation.com. Following is an edited transcript of their conversation.* —*The Editors*

Naomi Klein: So, the film is wonderful. Congratulations. It is, as many people have already heard, an unapologetic call for a revolt against capitalist madness. But the week it premiered, a very different kind of revolt was in the news: the so-called tea parties, seemingly a passionate defense of capitalism and against social programs.

Meanwhile, we are not seeing too many signs of the hordes storming Wall Street. Personally, I’m hoping that your film is going to be the wake-up call and the catalyst for all of that changing. But I’m just wondering how you’re coping with this odd turn of events, these revolts *for* capitalism led by Glenn Beck.

Michael Moore: I don’t know if they’re so much revolts in favor of capitalism as they are being fueled by a couple of different agendas, one being the fact that a number of Americans still haven’t come to grips with the fact that there’s an African-American who is their leader. And I don’t think they like that.

NK: Do you see that as the main driving force for the tea parties?

MM: I think it’s one of the forces—but I think there’s a number of agendas at work here. The other agenda is the corporate agenda. The healthcare companies and other corporate concerns are helping to pull together what seems like a spontaneous outpouring of citizen anger.

But the third part of this is—and this is what I really have always admired about the right wing: they are organized, they are dedicated, they are up at the crack of dawn fighting their fight. And on our side, I don’t really see that kind of commitment.

When they were showing up at the town-hall meetings in August—those meetings are open to everyone. So where are the people from our side? And then I thought, Wow, it’s August. You ever try to organize anything on the left in August?

NK: Wasn’t part of it also, though, that the left, or progressives, or whatever you want to call them, have been in something of a state of disarray with regard to the Obama administration—that most people favor universal healthcare, but they couldn’t rally behind it because it wasn’t on the table?

MM: Yes. And that’s why Obama keeps turning around and looking for the millions behind him, supporting him, and there’s nobody even standing there, because he chose to take a half measure instead of the full measure that needed to happen. Had he taken the full measure—true single-payer, universal healthcare—I think he’d have millions out there backing him up.

NK: Now that the Baucus plan is going down in flames, do you think there’s another window to put universal healthcare on the table?

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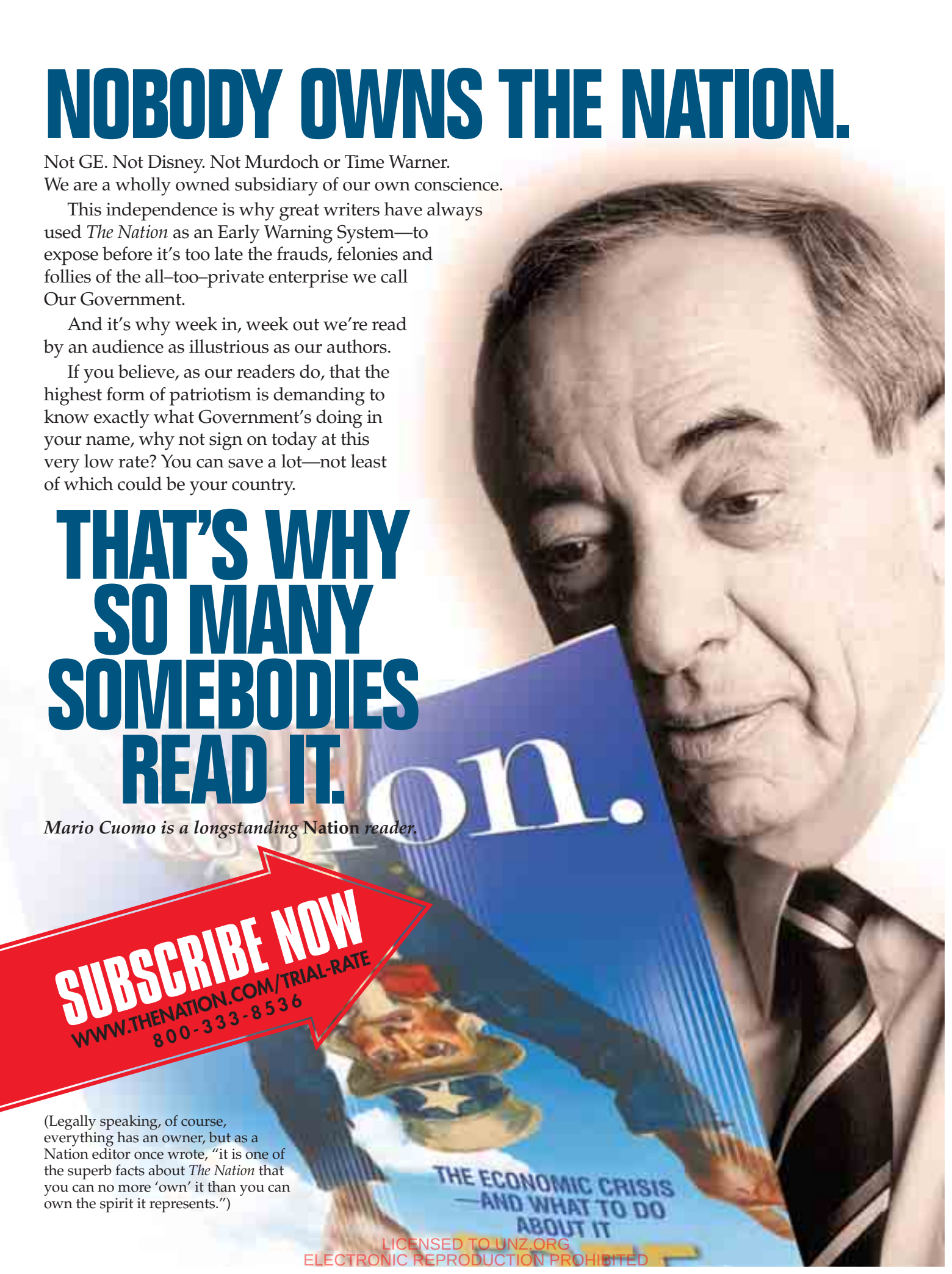

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MM: Yes. And we need people to articulate the message and get out in front of this and lead it. You know, there's close to a hundred Democrats in Congress who had already signed on as co-signers to John Conyers's bill. Obama, I think, realizes now that whatever he thought he was trying to do with bipartisanship or holding up the olive branch, that the other side has no interest in anything other than the total destruction of anything he has stood for or was going to try and do. So if [New York Congressman Anthony] Weiner or any of the other members of Congress want to step forward, now would be the time. And I certainly would be out there. I *am* out there. I mean, I would use this time right now to really rally people, because I think the majority of the country wants this.

NK: Coming back to Wall Street, I want to talk a little bit more about this strange moment that we're in, where the rage that was directed at Wall Street, what was being directed at AIG executives when people were showing up in their driveways—I don't know what happened to that.

My fear was always that this huge anger that you show in the film, the kind of uprising in the face of the bailout, which forced Congress to vote against it that first time, that if that anger wasn't continuously directed at the most powerful people in society, at the elites, at the people who had created the disaster, and channeled into a real project for changing the system, then it could easily be redirected at the most vulnerable people in society; I mean immigrants, or channeled into racist rage.

And what I'm trying to sort out now is, Is it the same rage or do you think these are totally different streams of American culture—have the people who were angry at AIG turned their rage on Obama and on the idea of health reform?

MM: I don't think that is what has happened. I'm not so sure they're the same people.

In fact, I can tell you from my travels across the country while making the film and even in the last few weeks, there is something else that's simmering beneath the surface. You can't avoid the anger boiling over at some point when you have one in eight mortgages in delinquency or foreclosure, where there's a foreclosure filing once every 7.5 seconds and the unemployment rate keeps growing. That will have its own tipping point.

And the scary thing about that is that historically, at times when that has happened, the right has been able to successfully manipulate those who have been beaten down and use their rage to support what they used to call fascism.

Where has it gone since the crash? It's a year later. I think that people felt like they got it out of their system when they voted for Obama six weeks later and that he was going to ride into town and do the right thing. And he's kind of sauntered into town promising to do the right thing but not accomplishing a whole heck of a lot.

Now, that's not to say that I'm not really happy with a number of things I've seen him do.

To hear a president of the United States admit that we overthrew a democratically elected government in Iran, that's one of the things on my list I thought I'd never hear in my lifetime. So there have been those moments.

And maybe I'm just a bit too optimistic here, but he was raised by a single mother and grandparents and he did not grow up with money. And when he was fortunate enough to be able to go to Harvard and graduate from there, he didn't then go and do something where he could become rich; he decides to go work in the inner city of Chicago.

Oh, and he decides to change his name back to what it was on the birth certificate—Barack. Not exactly the move of somebody who's trying to become a politician. So he's shown us, I think, in his lifetime many things about where his heart is, and he slipped up during the campaign and told Joe the Plumber that he believed in spreading the wealth.

And I think that those things that he believes in are still there. Now, it's kind of up to him. If he's going to listen to the Rubins and the Geithners and the Summerses, you and I lose. And a lot of people who have gotten involved, many of them for the first time, won't get involved again. He will have done more to destroy what needs to happen in this country in terms of people participating in their democracy. So I hope he understands the burden that he's carrying and does the right thing.

NK: Well, I want to push you a little bit on this, because I understand what you're saying about the way he's lived his life and certainly the character he appears to have. But he is the person who appointed Summers and Geithner, who you're very appropriately hard on in the film.

And one year later, he hasn't reined in Wall Street. He reappointed Bernanke. He's not just appointed Summers but has given him an unprecedented degree of power for a mere economic adviser.

MM: And meets with him every morning.

NK: Exactly. So what I worry about is this idea that we're always psychoanalyzing Obama, and the feeling I often hear from people is that he's being duped by these guys. But these are his choices, and so why not judge him on his actions and really say, "This is on him, not on them"?

MM: I agree. I don't think he is being duped by them; I think he's smarter than all of them.

When he first appointed them I had just finished interviewing a bank robber who didn't make it into the film, but he is a bank robber who is hired by the big banks to advise them on how to avoid bank robberies.

So in order to not sink into a deep, dark pit of despair, I said to myself that night, That's what Obama's doing. Who

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better to fix the mess than the people who created it? He's bringing them in to clean up their own mess. Yeah, yeah. That's it. That's it. Just keep repeating it: "There's no place like home, there's no place like home…"

NK: And now it turns out they were just being brought in to keep stealing.

MM: Right. So now it's on him.

NK: All right. Let's talk about the film some more. I saw you on Leno, and I was struck that one of his first questions to you was this objection—that it's *greed* that's evil, not capitalism. And this is something that I hear a lot—this idea that greed or corruption is somehow an aberration from the logic of capitalism rather than the engine and the centerpiece of capitalism. And I think that that's probably something you're already hearing about the terrific sequence in the film about those corrupt Pennsylvania judges who were sending kids to private prison and getting kickbacks. I think people would say, That's not capitalism, that's corruption.

Why is it so hard to see the connection, and how are you responding to this?

'People want to believe it's not the economic system that's at the core of all this. You know, it's just a few bad eggs.' —Michael Moore

MM: Well, people want to believe that it's not the economic system that's at the core of all this. You know, it's just a few bad eggs. But the fact of the matter is that, as I said to Jay [Leno], capitalism is the legalization of this greed.

Greed has been with human beings forever. We have a number of things in our species that you would call the dark side, and greed is one of them. If you don't put certain structures in place or restrictions on those parts of our being that come from that dark place, then it gets out of control. Capitalism does the opposite of that. It not only doesn't really put any structure or restriction on it. It encourages it, it rewards it.

I'm asked this question every day, because people are pretty stunned at the end of the movie to hear me say that it should just be eliminated altogether. And they're like, "Well, what's wrong with making money? Why can't I open a shoe store?"

And I realized that [because] we no longer teach economics in high school, they don't really understand what any of it means.

The point is that when you have capitalism, capitalism encourages you to think of ways to make money or to make more money. And the judges never could have gotten the kickbacks had the county not privatized the juvenile hall. But because there's been this big push in the past twenty or thirty years to privatize government services, take it out of our hands, put it in the hands of people whose only concern is their fiduciary responsibility to their shareholders or to their own pockets, it has messed everything up.

NK: The thing that I found most exciting in the film is that you make a very convincing pitch for democratically run workplaces as the alternative to this kind of loot-and-leave capitalism.

So I'm just wondering, as you're traveling around, are you seeing any momentum out there for this idea?

MM: People love this part of the film. I've been kind of surprised because I thought people aren't maybe going to understand this or it seems too hippie-dippy—but it really has resonated in the audiences that I've seen it with.

But, of course, I've pitched it as a patriotic thing to do. So if you believe in democracy, democracy can't be being able to vote every two or four years. It has to be every part of every day of your life.

We've changed relationships and institutions around quite considerably because we've decided democracy is a better way to do it. Two hundred years ago you had to ask a woman's father for permission to marry her, and then once the marriage happened, the man was calling all the shots. And legally, women couldn't own property and things like that.

Thanks to the women's movement of the '60s and '70s, this idea was introduced to that relationship—that both people are equal and both people should have a say. And I think we're better off as a result of introducing democracy into an institution like marriage.

But we spend eight to ten to twelve hours of our daily lives at work, where we have no say. I think when anthropologists dig us up 400 years from now—if we make it that far—they're going to say, "Look at these people back then. They thought they were free. They called themselves a democracy, but they spent ten hours of every day in a totalitarian situation and they allowed the richest 1 percent to have more financial wealth than the bottom 95 percent combined."

Truly they're going to laugh at us the way we laugh at people 150 years ago who put leeches on people's bodies to cure them.

NK: It is one of those ideas that keeps coming up. At various points in history it's been an enormously popular idea. It is actually what people wanted in the former Soviet Union instead of the Wild West sort of mafia capitalism that they ended up with. And what people wanted in Poland in 1989 when they voted for Solidarity was for their state-owned companies to be turned into democratically run workplaces, not to be privatized and looted.

But one of the biggest barriers I've found in my research around worker cooperatives is not just government and companies being resistant to it but actually unions as well. Obviously there are exceptions, like the union in your film, United Electrical Workers, which was really open to the idea of the Republic Windows & Doors factory being turned into a cooperative, if that's what the workers wanted. But in most cases, particularly with larger unions, they have their script, and when a factory is being closed down their job is to get a big payout—as big a payout as they can, as big a severance package as they can for the workers. And they have a dynamic that is in place, which is that the powerful ones, the decision-makers, are the owners.

You had your US premiere at the AFL-CIO convention.

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How are you finding labor leadership in relation to this idea? Are they open to it, or are you hearing, "Well, this isn't really workable"? Because I know you've also written about the idea that some of the auto plant factories or auto parts factories that are being closed down could be turned into factories producing subway cars, for instance. The unions would need to champion that idea for it to work.

MM: I sat there in the theater the other night with about 1,500 delegates of the AFL-CIO convention, and I was a little nervous as we got near that part of the film, and I was worried that it was going to get a little quiet in there.

Just the opposite. They cheered it. A couple people shouted out, "Right on!" "Absolutely!" I think that unions at this point have been so beaten down, they're open to some new thinking and some new ideas. And I was very encouraged to see that.

The next day at the convention the AFL-CIO passed a resolution supporting single-payer healthcare. I thought, Wow, you know? Things are changing.

NK: Coming back to what we were talking about a little earlier, about people's inability to understand basic economic theory: in your film you have this great scene where you can't get anybody, no matter how educated they are, to explain what a derivative is.

So it isn't just about basic education. It's that complexity is being used as a weapon against democratic control over the economy. This was Greenspan's argument—that derivatives were so complicated that lawmakers couldn't regulate them.

It's almost as if there needs to be a movement toward simplicity in economics or in financial affairs, which is something that Elizabeth Warren, the chief bailout watchdog for Congress, has been talking about in terms of the need to simplify people's relationships with lenders.

So I'm wondering what you think about that. Also, this isn't really much of a question, but isn't Elizabeth Warren sort of incredible? She's kind of like the anti-Summers. It's enough to give you hope, that she exists.

MM: Absolutely. And can I suggest a presidential ticket for 2016 or 2012 if Obama fails us? [Ohio Congresswoman] Marcy Kaptur and Elizabeth Warren.

NK: I love it. They really are the heroes of your film. I would vote for that.

I was thinking about what to call this piece, and what I'm going to suggest to my editor is "America's Teacher," because the film is this incredible piece of old-style popular education. One of the things that my colleague at *The Nation* Bill Greider talks about is that we don't do this kind of popular education anymore, that unions used to have budgets to do this kind of thing for their members, to just unpack economic theory and what's going on in the world and make it accessible. I know you see yourself as an entertainer, but I'm wondering, do you also see yourself as a teacher?

MM: I'm honored that you would use such a term. I like teachers. ■

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Meet the Hazzards

If banks were people, here's what the full $17.5 trillion bailout would look like.

by NOMI PRINS AND CHRISTOPHER HAYES

As we mark the end of the first year of the financial bailout, the public seems to regard the government's actions with a toxic combination of rage and confusion. People are pissed off but too bewildered to know what to do with that anger. The confusion isn't an accident. The government hasn't exactly been forthcoming about how it's made buckets of money available to the banking sector. When it does disclose some information—such as in July's SIGTARP report from the Treasury or the Federal Reserve's weekly balance sheet—it's in the form of intimidating descriptions, accounting mumbo jumbo and technical reports that do little to illuminate just what the hell is going on.

What's worse, banks and the establishment press have portrayed TARP as the sum of the banking industry's federal subsidies. An August 30 *New York Times* article, "As Banks Repay Bailout Money, U.S. Sees a Profit," gives the impression that taxpayers should be happy to have made $4 billion on the deal, as if our checks were in the mail. But when the government became Wall Street's bank, it wasn't just $700 billion of TARP money that flew north to Wall Street. TARP was but a small fraction (roughly 4 percent) of the full $17.5 trillion bailout and subsidization of the financial sector. The details of this total bailout are complicated, but the basic mechanisms aren't beyond the average citizen's grasp. We're going to walk you through it.

Five Easy Pieces: The Tale of Joe and Katie

There are five ways the Treasury, the Fed and other government entities have propped up the banking sector. In order to understand how each of these works, let's consider how this assistance might have looked had it been directed at a household, rather than a bank, teetering on the edge of bankruptcy. The analogy isn't exact, but considering the bailout in this manner helps make the whole thing a lot clearer.

Imagine a couple living in a three-bedroom house outside the Twin Cities. Call them Joe and Katie Hazzard. The Hazzards own a small off-track-betting (OTB) business and have some investments and a mortgage on their house. But business is terrible (no one has extra money to make bets); Katie recently lost her job; their investments have hemorrhaged value; and they can't make their mortgage, car or credit card payments. So they ask their local bank for a loan. "No dice," says the bank. "We can't give you money to pay your debts because you're no longer a good credit risk for us." That's more or less what happened to the banks last fall: they couldn't and wouldn't lend to one another.

Capital Injections and Direct Loans

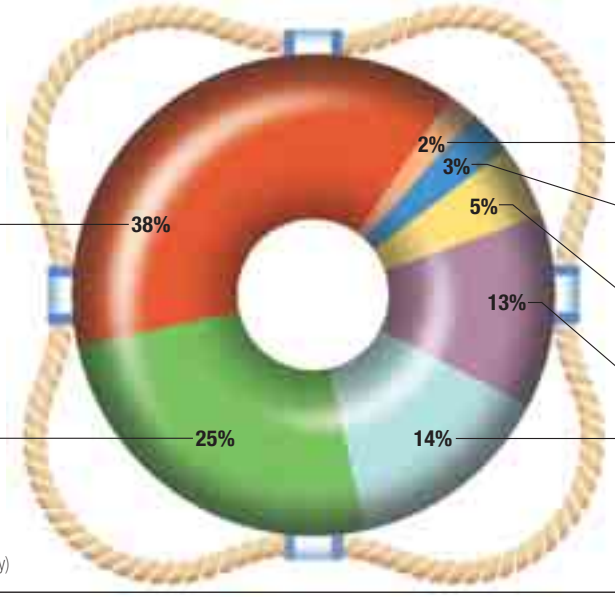
So the Hazzards go to the Federal Bailout Bank, which says, "Here's some money. Do with it what you want, and someday down the road, if and when you're out of the woods, you'll have to pay us back with a little bit of interest." That's roughly what the $700 billion TARP was: a direct injection of capital to purchase preferred shares, which is really more like extending a loan than making the investment the government said it was, with some very light strings attached.

But then Joe says that the handout isn't enough. It turns out that not only does he own a gambling business; he has a bit of a gambling habit. Joe made big money in previous years betting on the New England Patriots to win the Super Bowl and figured he couldn't go wrong placing the same wager again. But then Tom Brady injured his knee last year, and Joe got creamed.

Types of Federal Assistance to the Financial Sector

as of August 2009

$ in billions, rounded



Adapted from Nomi Prins's book *It Takes a Pillage: Behind the Bailouts, Bonuses, and Backroom Deals From Washington to Wall Street* (Wiley)

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About Your Professor

Dr. Irwin Weil is a Professor in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literature at Northwestern University. He earned his B.A. and M.A. at the University of Chicago and his Ph.D. at Harvard University. He is the recipient of the Northwestern University College of Arts and Sciences Award for distinguished teaching and the Gold Pushkin Medal from the International Association of Teachers of Russian and Russian Literature.

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Inveterate gambler that he is, he's doubled down on the Patriots this year, but he won't be paid off (if, that is, the Patriots win) until later in the year. But Joe has a boatload of outstanding gambling debts he needs to pay now.

So the Federal Bailout Bank decides it'll help out. To cover the truly pressing debts (the bookie is about to send over some goons with baseball bats), the bank will just write a check. That's what the Fed did to back the losses of AIG's credit default swaps and other businesses, and what the Fed and Treasury did together by providing protection to Citigroup in the event that more of its toxic assets lost value. The money—$1.4 trillion—was structured as a loan, but it's a bit unclear how it will ever be paid back.

In addition to his bets on the Patriots, it turns out, Joe's been making bets on just about anything, the outcomes of which have yet to be determined. The Hazzards are scared that a lot of these bets don't look too promising (e.g., Joe's wager that Kanye West will win this year's Nobel Peace Prize). What they want is to unload their positions in those bets, to have some other gambler pay them the original sum they put down and take on the risk. If the bet makes good, the new gambler would get the rewards. If it doesn't, he would take the loss. But they can't find anyone to do that because so many of Joe's wagers were so reckless.

Once again, the Bailout Bank steps in to sweeten the deal, telling would-be gamblers it will put in $6 for every $1 they put up. That means Joe's Kanye West bet for $100 (at very long odds) can now be purchased by a fellow gambler for just $14.28. If Kanye does, in fact, win the Nobel, then this lucky gambler will get paid as if he had put up the whole $100. If not, he's only out fourteen bucks. That's the crux of Tim Geithner's $1 trillion Public-Private Investment Fund, which would bring the full amount of capital injections and direct loans to $2.4 trillion.

Indirect Loans and Guarantees

The Hazzards come back and claim that wasn't enough; they're still screwed. So the bank says, "We can give you some more short-term, thirty-day loans to get you through (even longer-term ones if that doesn't work), but you have to post collateral. It doesn't have to be very valuable: your old bicycles in the garage, your basement sofa-bed, maybe that baseball card collection you planned to use to pay for your kids' college educations. And if you still need more at the end of the thirty days, you can post some more junk from your attic as collateral."

This more or less corresponds to the newly established Federal Reserve facilities (think: credit unions for banks), which provide money to banks in exchange for various assets as collateral. Both the Federal Reserve and the Federal Reserve Bank of New York administer these facilities. They run the gamut from the $1.8 trillion Commercial Paper Funding Facility, created to provide more credit for households and businesses (which, to be fair, did help calm the markets; but it didn't get to households or to most small businesses), to the $540 billion Money Market Investor Funding Facility, created to back private funds owned by banks, insurance companies or investment advisory companies.

Joe comes back again to Bailout Bank and says that he's still short, but he has a proposal. "I'm not going to ask you for any more loans. Promise. Instead, I'm going to see if someone else will lend me money. The problem is, I'm such a terrible credit risk I need someone to back me up. Maybe instead of me asking for a loan, I could kind of use your name to ask?" That's the role the FDIC played for Goldman Sachs and other firms, which took advantage of $940 billion in FDIC guarantees to raise cheap money for themselves and another $684 billion of backing for their trading accounts as an additional perk.

All in all, these kinds of guarantees, along with the indirect collateral loans for the banking industry, total $6.7 trillion, and there is precious little transparency coming from the Fed regarding most of it. In fact, Ben Bernanke told Congress in November that too much transparency about which banks got which loans and for what collateral would be "counterproductive."

General Backing and Subsidization

Bailout Bank isn't done helping the Hazzards. It turns out that the couple also has a vacation condo that's lost some value. As part of propping up their balance sheet, the Bailout Bank promises to guarantee the price of the condo. In other words, if Joe and Katie are forced to sell the condo for less than its value before the housing crisis, the Bailout Bank will write them a check for the difference in price.

This is considered "general backing," and in the bailout economy it applies to all kinds of things that weren't supposed to lose value but did and might continue to do so in the future—most important, money market funds. About $4.4 trillion was set aside for general backing of financial firms, including $3.7 trillion to mitigate any future problems with money market funds and an extra $700 billion for the FDIC to continue to back depositor funds. (The banks didn't want to pony up more premiums to do it themselves. Can you imagine just deciding you don't want to pay your insurance premiums, yet receiving insurance anyway? Well, it's like that.)

Government-Sponsored Entities Help

Another part of what's putting the hurt on the Hazzards is the plummeting value of their big investment in what had been the rock-solid, blue-chip ABC Corp. This was supposed to be one of their safest investments, but now they can't sell the stock without taking a massive loss. So the Bailout Bank steps in. It starts buying tons of ABC stock, flooding it with capital and creating an inflated price for the stock in the process. This in turn raises the value of the Hazzards' investment. Bailout Bank even goes so far as to start buying ABC's products, hoping to increase its sales and thus its stock price.

Though a bit imprecise, this is basically how the Fed and Treasury propped up Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac and in the process helped the banks. The Treasury bought Fannie and Freddie stock and also the mortgages that the two enterprises sell, plus it gave them some extra money to lend. All the government's financial assistance to prop up entities that were considered safe at one point comes to $2.2 trillion.

Nomi Prins is the author of It Takes a Pillage: Behind the Bailouts, Bonuses, and Backroom Deals From Washington to Wall Street. *Christopher Hayes is* The Nation*'s Washington editor.*

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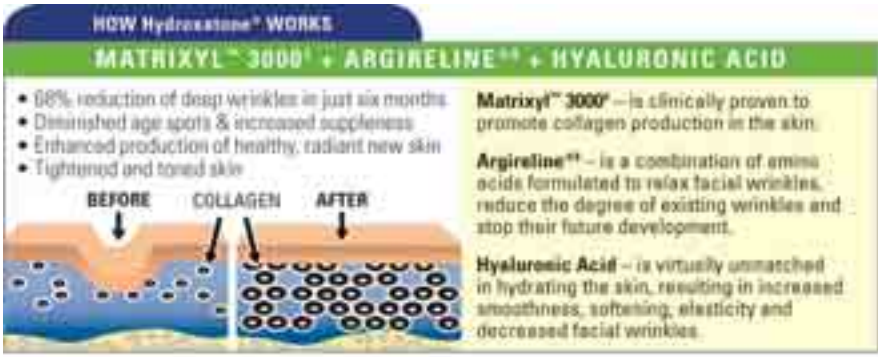
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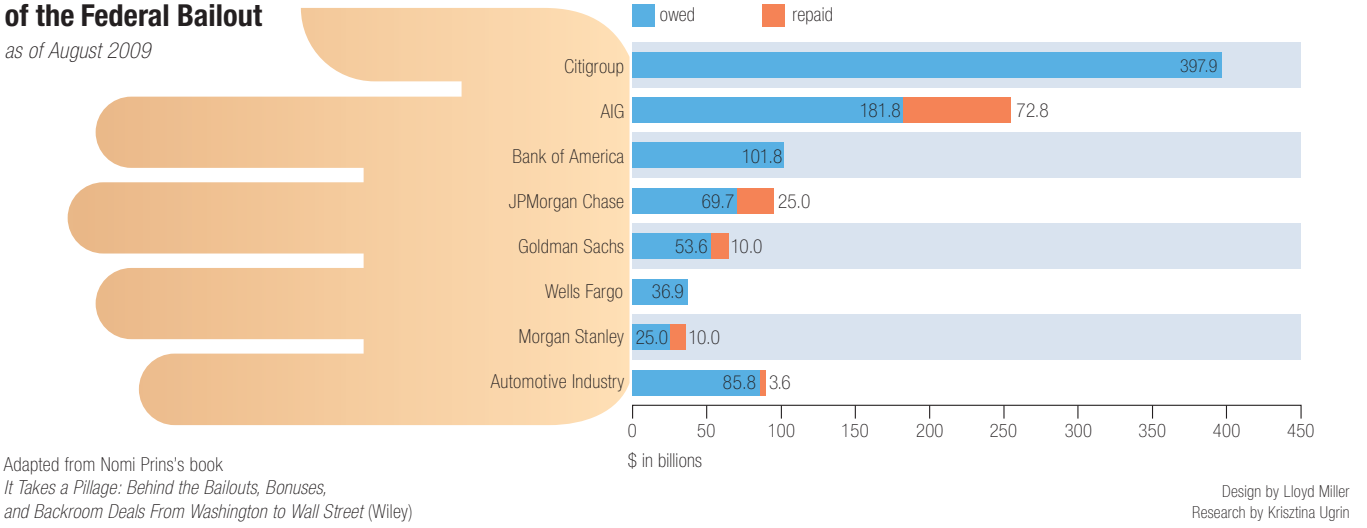

Global Market and Credit Expansions

Finally, just to make sure the Hazzards can get by, the Bailout Bank decides to help everyone who might use their business with some capital of their own. Since the couple runs an OTB business, when the bank gives a shot of money to everyone in town, a few people start gambling with the Hazzards again. In effect, that's what the Fed did when it dumped $905 billion into international markets to move things along and another $881 billion into domestic ones. Throwing cash here and there into the markets is the Fed's job; throwing the amounts it did was an act of desperation, although almost certainly needed.

It's important to remember that not everything the government did was solely bank-friendly. The Fed and Treasury extended $1.82 trillion in fiscal support, including about $1 trillion in direct consumer assistance (including the Recovery Act, the Cash for Clunkers program and first-time homebuyer tax breaks). It gave another $881 billion to help guarantee various federal home mortgage programs, which really did help homeowners. But this help is dwarfed by the mountains of dollars thrown at Wall Street.

Our Joe and Katie Hazzard parable is inexact. Not every bank took advantage of every kind of assistance (though some, like Citigroup, pretty much did). And households aren't structured like banks; they don't lend money or borrow big to bet big. But that's why cheap credit is a much bigger boon to banks than to households. Borrowing at a lower rate than they lend is how banks make money. Getting to borrow for next to nothing almost guarantees massive profits.

The Hazzards' tale does illuminate a few key aspects of the bailout that tend to be obscured by acronyms and decimal places. It shows the extraordinary measures the government took to prop up the banks and the financial system. It's not just one mechanism, one check or one loan. It's concentric circles of support, from "Here's some money to cover your losses" (AIG) to "We're gonna make sure there's money flowing through all the neighborhoods near you so you keep having customers" (international assistance).

It also shows how hard it is to answer the question, How much did it all cost? The amount of money that's been floated, injected and dispersed in the ways we've listed above is $17.5 trillion. But what the final cost will be is not yet clear. A lot depends on how the Hazzards do. They might pay back a lot of the loans (perhaps even with interest) and not use up the guarantees. Their condo may rise in value, or they might have to sell it at a loss and rely on the Bailout Bank's price guarantee. The baseball card collection taken as collateral may end up in the bank's hands, and then the total loss will depend on what the card collection turns out to be worth. In short, while we can add up the total exposure of the bailouts, we can't yet tally their cost.

Finally, our tale shows how fully the banking industry has relied on the government to keep it afloat. This is a crucial point because many banks want to argue that once they've paid back their TARP money, they have discharged their obligations and are private entities again, unbeholden in any way to taxpayers.

Another question our parable doesn't answer is, Where does all the money come from? Most of it has been "printed" by the Fed, which expanded its balance sheet and, in so doing, created money out of thin air. There's nothing wrong with printing money for the sake of keeping us from another Great Depression. In fact, not taking this step would have been disastrous. But the problem is how the money has been channeled. All that money was funneled through the banks; the real Joe and Katies—the actual households facing foreclosure and declining assets—haven't gotten much help. In fact, foreclosures are at an all-time high (7.5 million US homes are in foreclosure), and there have been 1.25 million personal bankruptcies this year through June (up 34 percent from last year). Unemployment continues to climb. The FDIC continues to take over failing banks. Credit has tightened, not loosened as all the pre-bailout rhetoric promised.

A fraction of the $17.5 trillion bailout could have been used to cut the principal of homeowners' mortgages (using homes, even devalued ones, as collateral) and cover student loans at zero percent interest. Rather than pouring it into the top layers—the

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banks—a people's bailout would have cost less and been more humane. And it likely would have prevented the ongoing increase in defaults, foreclosures and general economic anxiety.

The banks would have hated that, of course. Even in their degraded state they have a lot of friends in Washington. Imagine if the Hazzards started using some of their easy money to hire lobbyists to make sure the Bailout Bank maintained its pro-Hazzard policies. Because that's what's going on. Banks are lobbying Congress very hard to maintain their setup. Just one year after the crisis, boasting record profits and on track for record bonuses, they are darkly warning that any new regulation could hamper growth.

Given the banks' newfound publicly sponsored financial health, Washington has little incentive to rock the boat by proposing serious reforms. True, some necessary steps are being discussed by Congress: it's important to have a Consumer Financial Protection Agency to counteract the damage caused by lax oversight, and higher capital requirements so that banks can pay for their own risk fallout. But the Fed should not be the premier risk regulator, nor should we believe that it will cap extreme bonuses—President Obama doesn't even support a cap. Parts of the media are already reporting the end of the recession; Obama has moved to reappoint Bernanke, crediting him with keeping the country from a Great Depression, and has given tacit approval to the free flow of bank subsidies. The Treasury, headed by the man who was at the helm of the New York Fed when it nearly went down, is no less culpable for bad decisions.

Such lack of accountability seems to be something of a theme. Despite conducting themselves recklessly, compulsively, almost sociopathically, our fictional Joe and Katie Hazzard got a lot of money to help maintain their lifestyle and assets. But what happens when they take all that money and double down on the wrong bet? Will they be back for another helping? Why wouldn't they be? Given everything our government has said and done so far, and the meager reform ideas on the table, it's very likely there will be another bad bet coming from the entire industry—and with it, the vaporizing of much of the assistance doled out to avoid that very occurrence. ■

How to Save the News

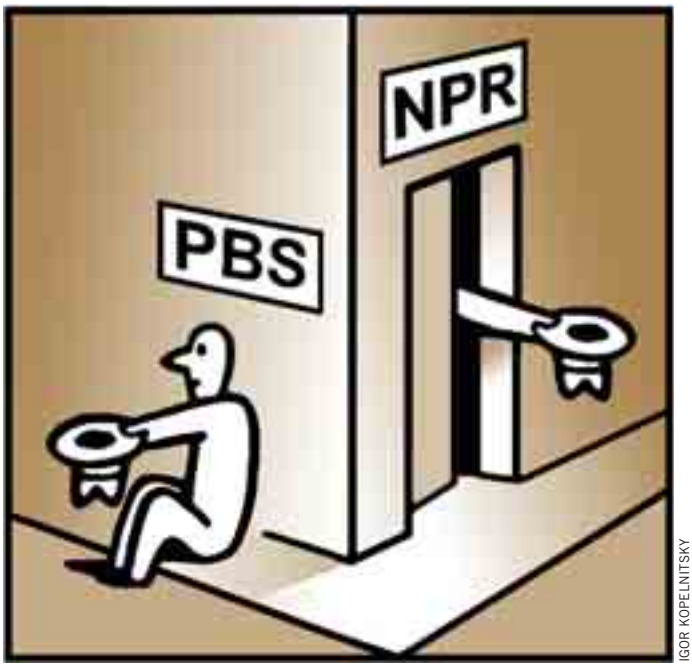
It's time to focus less on what has caused the crisis and start talking seriously about solutions.

by WILLIAM F. BAKER

There's no doubt that news in America is in trouble. Of the 60,000 print journalists employed throughout the nation in 2001, at least 10,000 have lost their jobs, and last year alone newspaper circulation dropped by a precipitous 7 percent. Internet, network and cable news employ a dwindling population of reporters, not nearly enough to cover a country of 300 million people, much less keep up with events around the world. It is no longer safe to assume, as the authors of the Constitution did, that free-flowing news and information will always be available to America's voters.

It's time for the public discussion to focus less on what has caused this swiftly escalating crisis—the mass migration of readers to the Internet and the effects of the economic meltdown feature in most explanations—and start talking seriously about solutions. Saving journalism might seem like an entirely new problem, but it's really just another version of one that Americans have solved many times before: how do we keep a vital public institution safe from the ups and downs of the economy? Private philanthropy and government support are the two best answers we have to this question.

One of the best-known examples of philanthropy's response to the news crisis is ProPublica (propublica.org), which was founded in 2007 by editor in chief Paul Steiger with retired banking tycoons Herbert and Marion Sandler. The group, which relies mainly on grants from the Sandlers to stay in operation, maintains a staff of thirty-five reporters and editors, who specialize in hard-hitting investigative journalism with a long memory, the kind that cash-strapped commercial media have always been wary of supporting. With stories on Hurricane Katrina and Guantánamo already published in places like the



IGOR KOPELNITSKY

William F. Baker, president emeritus of WNET, the country's largest PBS station, is Bernard L. Schwartz Professor and Journalist-in-Residence at Fordham University. Evan Leatherwood, who helped research and write this article, is a freelance writer based in Brooklyn, New York.

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New York Times, the *Washington Post* and *The Nation* [see A.C. Thompson, "Katrina's Hidden Race War," January 5], the group exemplifies how valuable the nonprofit news sector can be.

The group's finances and the scope of its operations, however, are a perfect example of why philanthropy can never be the sole answer to America's news crisis. ProPublica's annual budget of $10 million is exceptional by philanthropic standards, but it is still less than a single newspaper, Denver's *Rocky Mountain News*, was losing per year before its owners shut it down. An army of ProPublicas is needed before America can replace the capacity for good journalism it has already lost.

That said, the private, not-for-profit news sector is worth paying attention to. Some of the new organizations cropping up might be models for others, if they're successful. Two representative examples are the Investigative Network and the Under-Told Stories Project. Founded to fill a void in coverage of the multibillion-dollar Texas Statehouse budget, the Investigative Network (pressforthepeople.com) aims to use the revenue it gets from selling subscriptions to niche information streams to fund investigative journalism in the general public interest. The group's founder, investigative reporter Paul Adrian, hopes that funding will also come from story syndication and philanthropy. Groups with such a diverse mix of support as part of their initial business plans are likely to become more common.

The Under-Told Stories Project (undertoldstories.org) is devoted to increasing public awareness of underreported international topics. The group is funded partly by sale of its stories, most of which end up on public television and radio, and partly by its institutional partner, Saint John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota. Organizations that get some support from endowed nonmedia institutions might also become more common.

It's also worth noting that in an environment of diminishing opportunities for young journalists, the Under-Told Stories Project arranges internships. Ensuring that good reporting will be around in the long term is just as important as preserving what we have now, and the private, nonprofit media sector would do well to pursue it more vigorously. (Full disclosure: I am an unpaid adviser to both the Under-Told Stories Project and the Investigative Network.)

Because such fledgling enterprises are potentially so valuable to the health of our media, they should be loudly and publicly encouraged at this stage, even though there will never be enough of them to solve the news crisis on their own. At Harvard's Hauser Center, I've launched a database of nonprofit news efforts (hausercenter.harvard.edu/medialist). Many of the listed organizations are in the early stages of development, and now is the time when publicity and donations can make a decisive difference. If you're looking for somewhere to donate, or if you know of a group that we haven't found yet, I urge you to get in touch. But for a nation in the midst of a crippling news crisis, my list is still alarmingly short, and, as a potential replacement for our commercial media, it can never really be long enough.

I would love it if supporting the news were seen as a routine civic obligation—"this month's city hall coverage adopted by the Elks Club" is easy to imagine—but those days, if they ever come, are likely far in the future, and adopting a stretch of highway is a far cry from building it in the first place.

To survive the current crisis, we need bigger, faster solutions. We need to do what other mature democracies have long done: fully fund our public media with tax dollars. Calling in the resources of the central government to bear on any national problem is sure to be obscured by the fog of ideological and partisan distractions permeating the debates about the climate crisis and healthcare. I can already hear the hysterical, clamoring opposition to "socialized media" or "government takeover of the news."

We need to do what other mature democracies have long done: fully fund our public media with tax dollars.

Better funding for *All Things Considered* on NPR or *NewsHour* on PBS will not turn either program into a propaganda outfit for the government. The BBC is not *Pravda*, and Japan and most of Europe, which have enjoyed extremely well-funded public media for decades, are not a network of totalitarian states. German public television, for example, is amply funded with revenue collected under the aegis of the central government but administered through a decentralized system designed to preserve regional independence. There are numerous democratic nations with public broadcasting systems that are both well funded by their central government and also well shielded from its political influence.

In America, more robust public media won't weaken or constrain our commercial media. No matter how well funded PBS and NPR become, American cable news will still be free to devote 22 percent of its total coverage to stories like the death and burial of Anna Nicole Smith, as it did in February 2007.

Even though it goes against habits of American governance, and even though the Obama administration and its allies are mired in the slow advance of other ambitious projects, now is the moment to advocate greatly expanding our public media. The rapid corrosion of our commercial news demands that something be done soon, and it is still early in the administration of a popular, progressive president, when sweeping changes are possible.

John Nichols and Robert W. McChesney have correctly deemed efforts to solve the news crisis a national infrastructure project [see "The Death and Life of Great American Newspapers," April 6]. We don't leave it up to private nonprofits to maintain our roads and bridges, outfit the Army or provide public transportation. Volunteer militias and private fire departments rightly did not survive the progressive reforms of the nineteenth century. You can still hire a private security firm or travel in a private jet, but the government also assures a basic measure of protection and mobility to every taxpaying citizen.

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Why shouldn't it be the same for the news and information whose circulation the founding fathers saw fit to protect in the First Amendment?

Total federal support for American public broadcast media in 2007 was about $480 million. That might seem sufficient or even impressive until you compare it with the BBC, which serves a nation with one-fifth the US population but which received the equivalent of $5.6 billion in government money in 2007. When it comes to public media, the United States is decisively outspent by the governments of most other major democracies. Japan, whose population is less than half the size of the United States', spent the equivalent of $6.8 billion for public broadcasting in 2007; Germany, with one-third the size, spent about $11 billion; and Canada, a tenth the size, spent $898 million. Even Denmark and Ireland, with populations smaller than New York City, far outspent the United States per capita, with respective budgets equivalent to $673 million and $296 million.

The amount the government now sets aside for public broadcast media is about what it costs the military to occupy Iraq for two and a half days. Taking into account the hundreds of billions lavished on the interim survival of our elite financial institutions, funding our news infrastructure won't be a hardship. Just a small fraction of the $45 billion—that's billion with a "b"—Citigroup alone has received since October 2008 would give NPR and PBS all the money they need.

The amount the government sets aside for public broadcast media is about what it costs the military to occupy Iraq for two and half days.

Unlike the benefits that come from bailing out investment banks and insurance conglomerates, a stronger investment in public media would give all citizens a concrete and valuable service. Turn on cable TV news to find out about an event overseas, and you are likely to see a panel of well-coiffed pundits sitting in a studio in New York, Washington or Los Angeles debating what might be happening on the other side of the world. Switch to the same story on the BBC, and you are likely to see a correspondent on the ground where the event is actually taking place. The BBC's forty-one permanent foreign bureaus are more than twice the number maintained by ABC, CBS, NBC and PBS each. This isn't a difference of national character; it's simply a matter of money. For commercial TV, paying pundits is a lot cheaper than doing the real work of reporting. And for public media, chronically small budgets often make extensive original reporting too expensive, even for respected shows like *NewsHour*.

To discern the real view the American people hold toward public media, it is necessary to pay attention to one fact: voluntary viewer donations provide the biggest chunk of the money that keeps public media in business, and have done so for a very long time. The phrase "supported by viewers like you" is more than a marketing bromide. Except for stalwarts like the Ford and MacArthur foundations and Mutual of America, and in years past Exxon and AT&T, foundation and corporate giving has never provided as much to public television as small individual pledges. But despite its reliability, voluntary public subscription is no way to fund a major public service.

Throughout the two decades I was president of WNET, New York's PBS station, I spent a lot of time standing in front of cameras asking viewers for money, so I don't feel ashamed or unqualified to say that even though it has essentially saved the medium and mobilized millions of Americans, the drawn-out, droning pledge drive may finally be reaching a point of diminishing return. After factoring in the salaries of development departments, the costs of direct mail and on-air solicitation, premiums, thank-you letters and the requisite tote bag, a sizable portion of every dollar that comes in to public television is already spent. There is also the less quantifiable cost in viewers who, when faced with a pledge drive, simply change the channel.

For more than fifty years the American people have shown, through their generous donations, that they support the idea and the reality of public media. The government should acknowledge those decades of widespread support by funding NPR and PBS both more extensively and more efficiently.

By increasing direct allocations to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which is responsible for disbursing funding to public TV and radio affiliates across America, the inherent inefficiencies of fundraising via public appeal would be eliminated, and countless hours of airtime would be liberated from pledge drives. It would also mean that Americans would get more in return for the money they already pay to maintain the public media distribution network, which delivers NPR and PBS to 100 percent of the country.

Perhaps most important, pumping more money into our public media infrastructure could fortify the eroding foundation of print journalism, on which the rest of news media depend. News shows on PBS and NPR already routinely call on newspaper and magazine reporters to provide coverage. Expanding this practice could mean jobs for the rapidly growing number of unemployed print journalists, or even the survival of entire newsrooms in cities with closed or downsizing papers.

Once a newspaper or magazine is lost, its particular blend of institutional history, editorial and reporting expertise, and its ties to the community are never fully recoverable. But an expanded public media network, capable of deploying reporters across the nation and around the world, would at least make sure that someone is always available to gather the news, and keep government and business responsible to the public interest.

The costs of letting our journalistic institutions decay aren't visible like collapsed bridges or tent cities, but they're just as dire. A thriving news media, which America is in real danger of losing, is the unspoken assumption behind not only the First Amendment but the whole idea of self-government. It shouldn't seem radical to expect the same government that recognizes the freedom of the press to also ensure the survival of the press. ■

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Letters

(continued from page 2)

them for their lifetime. The children they surrender will feel abandoned and that they don't really fit in, even if they are never told about their adoption.

MARY-LEE LUTZ

BRISTOL, GA.

I am five months pregnant and a prolife advocate who until recently was considering adoption. (My boyfriend of five years did a 180 when he found out I was pregnant.) I did not go to a crisis pregnancy center but looked at a few adoption information and agency websites and spoke with my pastor, who is an adoption facilitator. One thing I noticed in all these sources was an overwhelming attempt to convince me that adoption was best for the baby and was the most unselfish and loving thing to do. My pastor even told me that raising the baby as a single mother was an "extreme situation." No one encouraged me to raise my child myself, although that was my stated preference.

I kept doing research. I was offended at the notion that a stranger could be a better parent to my son than I. I wanted to find out what happens to the children. I found that the US Census estimates that adoptees make up 2-3 percent of the population. The Center for Adoptive Families reports that 20 percent of adolescents in treatment for substance abuse are adoptees!

Then I began to discover the debilitating effects that relinquishment has on the mothers. They suffer deep psychological problems from a trauma very few can understand. Every one of them felt that they had lost something important and hoped to have a future relationship with their child if they didn't already have one.

The more research I did, the more I realized that I had the most important personal experience on which to draw: I was adopted at the age of 10. There's no guarantee that as much as an adoptive parent wants a child, he or she will be as loving, accepting and understanding as I could be to my son. I'm 26, have a degree and am fully capable of finding adequate employment. If adoption is almost guaranteed to bring us both long-term suffering with no guarantee of a truly better life for my son, I'll take my chances with the single-parent statistics.

NAOMI DEAL

SEATTLE

As a member of an adoptive family, the daughter of an adoption counselor and a prochoice feminist, I read Kathryn Joyce's article with great interest, and with some expertise. The stories Joyce shares are devastating to read. Unfortunately, she never contrasts this abuse with accounts of ethical adoption counseling or the bigger picture of open adoption. It includes, for instance, counselors who have dedicated their careers to advancing every woman's right to self-determination in the wake of an unplanned pregnancy; birth parents who remain involved in the lives of their relinquished children; adoptive families who have no contact with their child's birth parents; birth mothers and adoptive parents who view each other as soul mates; women who have decided to relinquish and then changed their minds in the delivery room. It also includes women forced to parent by birth fathers who have no desire or ability to raise a child but refuse to terminate their rights.

Every relinquishing mother has a unique experience, but there are some fundamental truths about open adoption. One such truth is that good adoption counselors—sincerely committed to birth mothers' choice, agency, emotional well-being and legal rights—are our strongest allies in the fight against predatory organizations. Another is that these ethical and knowledgeable counselors are widely available; no woman need ever seek "services" like those described by Joyce.

ERIN MOODY

Endangered Poets Society

SEATTLE

I just wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed reading James Longenbach's review of Wallace Stevens's poems ["A Music of Austerity," Sept. 14]. His points are close to the bone and persuasive. My teachers in the early 1960s, Ted Roethke and Nelson Bentley, called Stevens the father of us all. And as Longenbach points out, Stevens's poems have entered the language of modern American poetry. I will be sure to order a copy of Longenbach's *The Iron Key* next year. As everybody on the poetry scene knows, such poets as Stevens and Roethke are becoming an endangered species. So we should support the ones Keats and Yeats would welcome at the bar.

DUANE NIATUM

North of Eden

BRADENTON, FLA.

I loved Joanna Scott's "In the Theater of Isak Dinesen" [Aug. 31/Sept. 7]. I wrote my MA thesis on *Out of Africa* in the late 1960s. I thought then, as I do now, that it was a beautifully crafted work, which, as Scott points out, deliberately avoids realism to create an artificial, paradigmatic world. Africa is Eden before the Fall, remembered by Dinesen after she has been driven out of that innocent world. The book holds up well, but as Scott says, it is underappreciated by a literary establishment skewed in favor of middle-class realism.

Those who like Dinesen might enjoy *The Angelic Avengers*, a Gothic fantasy written under the pen name Pierre Andrezel, which she wrote during the Nazi occupation of Denmark. It had to be smuggled out of the country to America, where it was published. She said that she didn't know the fate of the book until long after the fact. The story relates the adventures of two innocent girls after they fall into the hands of a wicked uncle. It is a kind of allegory of the relationship of Denmark and Germany.

MYRA HUNTER JONES

Numbers Don't Lie

SAN DIEGO

David Cay Johnston's "By the Numbers" [Aug. 3/10] shows that Democratic administrations have outperformed Republican ones in private-sector job creation over the past sixty-eight years. He shows that Democrats created 64 percent of the total new jobs versus 36 percent for Republicans. However, this *additive* analysis understates the difference. The *multiplicative* method works from percentage increases in the job totals and multiplies these increases over time rather than adding them.

Using this approach we find that Democrats increased jobs by 179 percent in thirty-two years while the Republicans added only 55 percent in thirty-six years—an advantage of more than three to one in the Democrats' favor. On an annualized basis the Democrats achieved 3.25 percent per annum versus the Republicans' 1.22 percent.

The importance of this latter analysis is made clear by comparing FDR/Truman to Clinton. The raw numbers show Clinton with almost 5.5 million more jobs created in four fewer years, but Clinton's annualized percentage increase is 2.68 percent as against the 3.98 percent for FDR/Truman.

CHARLES ZAHN

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Books & the Arts.

Ratmansky Takes Manhattan

by MARINA HARSS

A ballet not performed is a ballet soon forgotten. Unlike opera or symphonic music, dance has no written score. Most ballets are not notated, and even video recordings are limited in their usefulness: they cannot capture the details of a performance's three-dimensional use of space, the nuance of its steps, the texture of its patterns. Other than a handful of ballets labeled "classic"—*Swan Lake*, *La Sylphide*, *Giselle*—and a fraction of the works created by a small group of twentieth-century masters (Fokine, Ashton, Balanchine, Tudor, Robbins), the vast majority of dances leave almost no trace of their passing. This fleetingness is a source of constant worry among balletomanes. Is the best behind us? Are we destined to a horizon of diminishing returns, of endless repetition of "classics" interspersed with short-lived novelties and intriguing experiments leading nowhere? Is the whole notion of dancing *en pointe*, using a series of recognizable traditional positions, a fading relic of a dim past?

I think there is reason for hope; in recent years there have been compelling works by William Forsythe, Twyla Tharp, Karole Armitage and, perhaps most encouraging, Christopher Wheeldon. Forsythe has profoundly redefined the ways in which the dancer's body can be arranged in space; more recently, however, he has forsaken the vocabulary of ballet. Tharp, who began as an experimental choreographer, has invigorated ballet with her brand of athleticism, deadpan glamour and quirkiness of execution; but her interest lies mainly in the contrast between classical dance and more vernacular forms, not in the language of ballet itself. Armitage continues to experiment with the erotic potential of the dancer's body and the tension created by ballet's extremes of flexibility, strength and control. Wheeldon, on the other hand, is interested in ballet as such, particularly in how movement innovation and emotionality—especially in the realm of the pas de deux—can be combined for maximum effect.

GENE SCHIAVONE/AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE

Alexei Ratmansky in rehearsal for *On the Dnieper* with American Ballet Theatre

But recently another choreographer has loomed large in the panorama of the *danse d'école*, reminding us of its vitality and appeal: Alexei Ratmansky. In the summer of 2008, after turning down an offer from the New York City Ballet, Ratmansky was named artist in residence at American Ballet Theatre. His arrival in New York has been the occasion of heated speculation and enormous excitement, in part because ABT has never had an official "artist in residence," though it has benefited from lasting, complicated relationships with other choreographers, like Antony Tudor and Tharp. Ratmansky's first full-length ballet for the company, *On the Dnieper*, premiered in early June, during the company's spring season at the Metropolitan Opera House.

Ratmansky was born in St. Petersburg in 1968, the son of a psychiatrist and an engineer. He grew up in Kiev and studied dance at the Bolshoi Academy in Moscow, graduating in the class of 1986 with the international ballet star Vladimir Malakhov. He was not taken into the Bolshoi company upon graduation, however (neither was Malakhov), and went on to dance in Kiev and Winnipeg and with the Royal Danish Ballet in Copenhagen. He is part of a unique new breed of Russian ballet dancers who matured in the immediate post-Soviet era and were able to perform both the Russian and the Western repertories, from Petipa and Bournonville classics to Balanchine, Tudor, Maurice Béjart and Tharp. This training provided Ratmansky with a wealth of styles from which to draw later as a choreographer: the attack and freeness of Tharp, the speed and musicality of Balanchine, the unaffected demeanor and intricate footwork of Bournonville, the psychological depth of Tudor.

Marina Harss is a translator and dance writer in New York City. Recent translations include Dino Buzzati's Poem Strip, *Mariolina Venezia's* Been Here a Thousand Years *and Alberto Moravia's* Conjugal Love.

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Musicality is a key feature of Ratmansky's work. He is adventurous in his choices and constantly on the prowl for scores that spark his imagination, a recent find being *On the Dnieper*, composed by Sergei Prokofiev in 1931 but recorded only in the 1990s. Written soon after *The Prodigal Son* and a few years before *Romeo and Juliet*, it contains echoes of both, though it lacks the marked "danciness" and sharp mood swings of *Prodigal* and the lyrical sweep of *Romeo*. It is beautiful and stirring but also, as Ratmansky points out, a bit puzzling. In the ABT studios in May, he was still trying to unlock its secrets through his characterization of the central figure of Sergei, as interpreted by ABT dancer Marcelo Gomes: "The main idea is a man comes back to the place where he used to live but hasn't been for a long time, and he starts to find a way to establish his identity within this place. He is in the center." This reading of the plot was not necessarily a feature of the original choreography—of which almost nothing is known—but it is the story the music was telling him.

Ratmansky no longer dances onstage; he has said it is difficult for him to look in the mirror, even though his 41-year-old body is hardly unfit. Yet his choreography seems to spring as much from his intensive analysis of scores and libretti as from his body and his particular way of moving. In the morning, before heading to the studio, he listens to the passage of music he will be focusing on that day, working out steps in his head. ("In Denmark," he told the *New York Times* last year, "I would put on some music and then switch on a camera and film myself. I wanted to see what my body would tell me because it's smarter. It responds to music almost spontaneously.") A while later, he strides energetically into the studio with an intense expression, as if already seeing the movement in his mind's eye, and immediately gets to work. Not a minute is wasted.

"Ladies, let's begin where we left off," he said during a rehearsal this spring, showing first one dancer's steps, then another's. As he watched a phrase he had created, he began to modify and refine it, making suggestions, showing the differences on his own body, building methodically from one phrase to the next. He moves fluidly and encourages fluidity in his dancers, as well as intention: "careful it doesn't look like an exercise," he said at one point to the girls. His attention to the nuances of timing and quality is constant and infinitely detailed, and he often asked to hear a phrase several times on the piano, sitting perfectly still or standing next to the instrument, discussing counts, tempos and accents. Ashley Bouder of the New York City Ballet, for whom Ratmansky created a whirlwind role in his *Concerto DSCH* last year, says that in rehearsals the choreographer seemed able to pick out "things that people don't normally hear in the music, and show them." The charming piece of fluff he created for Nina Ananiashvili at the ABT gala this spring, set to Khachaturian's "Waltz Masquerade," contained one of these tiny musical revelations, a little figure in the leg—out, in—echoed in the arms—out, up and then, out, down—that perfectly mirrored a pizzicato figure in the strings. It was as if Khachaturian had been dreaming of exactly this when he composed the piece.

Ratmansky's breakthrough came in 2003 with a revival of *The Bright Stream*.

By the time Ratmansky arrived in Denmark in 1997, he had begun to make ballets for a touring troupe of dancers formed by Ananiashvili, later for the Maryinsky (Kirov) Ballet in St. Petersburg and eventually for the Danes, for whom he created a *Nutcracker* in 2001. The few works I have seen from this early period are characterized by an enormous inventiveness and verve, if not necessarily great depth. *Middle Duet*, a short piece he made for the Maryinsky in 1998, is a stylish deconstruction of the tango, with little swivels *en pointe* and deep, indelicate pliés—he is a fan of the juicy plié—interspersed with fast, slicing kicks and small sideways jumps. It ends with the performers' apparent death in a messy heap onstage. From the same year, *Dreams About Japan*, performed in March 2008 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music by Ananiashvili, is a wickedly funny Eastern fantasy, set to Japanese taiko drumming and flute, in which Ratmansky riffs on the plots of four Kabuki plays, throwing in stylized "Japanese" notes—flexed feet, turned in legs, exotic arm flourishes—while gleefully acknowledging the fanciful nature of his vision. Ratmansky's delight at playing with Japanese themes, while using a recognizable and fairly straightforward classical vocabulary, provides the ballet's principal pleasure. But the piece also revealed his excellent ear for musical detail and his ability to elicit performances of surprising freedom. Who had ever seen Ananiashvili, famous for her dramatic interpretations of *Giselle* and *Swan Lake*, have such fun?

Ratmansky's breakthrough came in 2003 with a revival of *The Bright Stream*, an evening-length work by Shostakovich whose original production, which premiered in 1935, had a short, gruesome life. The ballet, Shostakovich's third, features a slight, ostensibly politically correct plot involving the visit of a troupe of performers from the capital to a collective farm during a harvest festival. A series of romantic entanglements ensue, leading to disguises, episodes of mistaken identity and amusing gender reversals. All is resolved in the end, and the peasants dance, celebrating their happy lives. Stalin disapproved of these silly antics, and the ballet was crucified in *Pravda* and pulled from the stage; Shostakovich was disgraced and never wrote another ballet, the choreographer Fyodor Lopukhov was fired and the co-librettist Adrian Piotrovsky was arrested and perished in the gulag.

Ratmansky decided to play the story straight, preserving the ballet's plot and cast of characters while reinventing the steps from scratch and adding some satiric touches. In the final dance, the peasants carry enormous vegetables, the prize, one assumes, for their virtuous labors. His guide, once again, was the music; he has described the score as one of "the most danceable, lovely scores ever written." He relished the opportunities for humor: one of the Muscovites, a male dancer, dresses up in a long gauzy tutu and *pointe* shoes to perform a hilarious and very accurate parody of Romantic ballerina conventions (the little hops, the soft arms, the coy looks). His partner, a classical ballerina, is similarly transformed, donning trousers and boots and knocking out a fantastic series of leaps and turns—an exact replica of a virtuoso male variation. Not only is the scene funny but the dancing is thrilling and marvelously varied—little jumps, big jumps, *manèges* around the stage, fast turns. But not all is fun and games on the collective farm. The outsized vegetables are an ironic reminder of the millions who starved to death during Stalin's forced collectivizations. And on a more intimate level, Zina, the heroine, is forced to disguise herself to win back her philandering husband; like the garden scene at the end of *Le Nozze di Figaro*, their pas de deux is bitter, humiliating and heart-wrenching. Ratmansky did not invent the situation—it's in the original scenario—but he understands it and knows

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how to draw out its pathos without resorting to melodrama.

The success of Ratmansky's *The Bright Stream* in Russia and abroad led to his appointment to the post of artistic director of the Bolshoi in 2004. The Bolshoi is a behemoth, with more than 200 dancers, and during the Soviet period it was the crown jewel of the Kremlin's cultural export policy. It specializes in lavish spectacles with heroic, "big" dancing; perhaps the most famous work in its repertory is *Spartacus*, a three-act tour de force about the Roman slave revolt, with music by Khachaturian. The man who made it, Yuri Grigorovich, directed the company with an iron fist for three decades, until he was pushed out in 1995. By the time Ratmansky arrived, at the tender age of 35, the company was in the throes of an identity crisis and beset with financial troubles. With characteristic modesty, he said at the time, "I am not sure if I am the right person, but I am willing to try."

Ratmansky's tenure in Moscow, which ended last year, was a success steeped in controversy. Breaking the monopoly of Soviet spectacles and Sovietized classics like *Don Quixote* and *The Pharaoh's Daughter*, he staged dances by Balanchine, Roland Petit, Tharp and Léonide Massine. He commissioned a ballet from Christopher Wheeldon, *Elsinore*. He invited veterans from abroad—including Violette Verdy, Adam Lüders and John Clifford—to teach class and coach the dancers. There was resistance: "None of the Bolshoi stars respect him and I don't know an important dancer who has not had a scandal with him," Nikolai Tsiskaridze, one of the company's principals, told the *Washington Post* in 2007. But Ratmansky forged ahead, firmly but gently nudging the company into the future. At the same time, he didn't lose sight of the Bolshoi's past. He staged a lavish reconstruction of *Le Corsaire*, a nineteenth-century pirate caper filled with spectacular dancing and equally brilliant effects—including a shipwreck—as well as an over-the-top, sexually charged *pas d'esclave*, a fixture at ballet galas (it was one of Nureyev's favorite bits). Performed this summer by the company at the Kennedy Center, the ballet received rave reviews for the exuberance of its dancing and the detail of its staging. Ratmansky also chose to preserve much of the repertory, including Grigorovich's *Spartacus*, realizing that these works are an important part of the company's identity. Perhaps he was also trying to please. "I don't like that some people hate what I'm doing. I want to be loved, or at least not dis-

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liked," he told Chip Brown of the *Times*. Even so, the Bolshoi stint was transformative. He featured and promoted younger dancers, like Ivan Vasiliev and Natalia Osipova, now rising international stars, and elevated the dancing of the whole company.

Ratmansky also decided to try his hand with two early Soviet ballets, *Bolt* and *Flames of Paris*. Almost nothing is known of the original choreography of the first (other than that it was trashed as "a grotesque dancification of everyday life" by the authorities), and only a few fragments remain of the second, including some vigorous group dances captured on film and a famous pas de deux that, like the *pas d'esclave* from *Le Corsaire*, is a mainstay of the gala circuit. In both cases, Ratmansky subtly adjusted the plot in order to emphasize the fate of a central figure. The original *Bolt* is a satiric ballet whose plot revolves around an act of sabotage by a lazy counterrevolutionary. In Ratmansky's version, he is a love-struck nonconformist driven by despair and drink. One can't help but sympathize.

GENE SCHIAVONE/AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE

Marcelo Gomes, Paloma Herrera and Veronika Part (bottom) in ABT's *On the Dnieper*

Two passages in particular come to mind. The first epitomizes Ratmansky's playful visual imagination, his ability to turn group dances into clever choreographic puns that reveal secrets about the nature of dance itself. The second takes the analogy one step further, exposing the emotional truth at the core of the ballet, as well as one of Ratmansky's recurring themes, the role of the outsider, the lonely figure and his—often unsuccessful—quest for identity. As the ballet opens, the factory workers, squeaky-clean in their rolled-up shorts and white shirts, line up for their morning calisthenics. With piano accompaniment, they perform a series of exercises, beginning with arm movements, then moving on to squats and leg lifts. Denis, the slacker, can't keep up and continually gets in everybody's way. One immediately thinks of the basic drills of ballet class, with its piano études and orderly series of port de bras, pliés and leg exercises. The other sequence occurs near the end, after the hapless Denis has been arrested and carried off. The smiling workers return for another round of gymnastics, but in the midst of this apotheosis of good health and good cheer, Denis returns to center stage, only to crumple to the ground, cut down, one imagines, by a barrage of bullets. He disappears so quickly into the crowd of legs and arms that one is unsure of what has just happened, as if awakening from a bad dream.

For all its good ideas, *Bolt* is an awkward ballet, with too many divertissements and not enough plot to hold them together, or at least that was my impression from a commercially available video recording. On the other hand, Ratmansky's *Flames of Paris*—a Soviet glorification of the overthrow of the ancien régime that ends with the beheading of the villain, a predatory Marquis—is a marvel, full of exciting regional dances, rococo details and nifty movement ideas, including a repeated running lunge-step-step figure executed by a group of soldiers. The famous *Flames of Paris* pas de deux, so often seen out of context, here becomes a wedding dance for two revolutionaries in love; gone are the taut heroics, replaced by youthful glee. There is also a wonderful rococo ballet-within-the-ballet, set at the palace of Versailles, on a mythological theme, performed with low, stately leg extensions and static poses. It is repeated, almost step for step but with different costumes, for the members of the National Convention.

Most contemporary ballets are abstract—no plot, no characters—and have as their goal the creation of striking images and novel ways of moving that break out of the expected patterns and shapes of classical form. In this, they are descendants of Balanchine (another Russian choreographer who made his way in the New World), who already in the 1920s had begun dispensing with plot and shaping the line of the body in new ways. Ratmansky too plays with the balletic vocabulary, but more gently. A favored repeating posture is the deeply drooping torso (a negation of ballet's defining uplift), which can express dejection, discouragement or simply exhaustion. At the end of *On the Dnieper*, it develops a new meaning: profound gratitude and reverence. But movement invention is not Ratmansky's primary interest. "I have a feeling that I found a vocabulary that I use, and every time I add a little bit to this vocabulary, but still [use] what I already have," he says. This vocabulary of steps includes windmill arms and side-to-side jumps, almost naturalistic port de bras, the beats of the lower leg used as a kind of onstage dialogue, sprinklings of everyday gestures, suggestions of folk dance and sport and a profusion of circling patterns. More than anything, his movement has a particular look—dynamic, open-chested, exposed, constantly shifting, often playful and starkly unstudied. For American audiences, this look has been largely defined by the two ballets he made for the New York City Ballet.

Russian Seasons, from 2006, is a meditation on the stages of life set to a song cycle by the contemporary Russian composer Leonid Desyatnikov. The music has a strong folk quality (percussive, syncopated rhythms, repetitive patterns with small variations), at times reminiscent of Stravinsky's *Les Noces*. Here, Ratmansky creates a small world with a shifting cast of characters and half-suggested story lines. In one of the most striking sections, "Lullaby," a girl in a simple, calf-length red dress dances alone, running forward and backward, looking lost. A line of women come on, stomping with big, vigorous strides, heads down, swinging their arms and clapping in a folk dance. The girl in red flings her arms, and her body droops as if possessed by an evil spirit. Three men encircle her but she escapes, falling into the arms of another man—perhaps a lover?—as she leaves the stage. With these few elements, Ratmansky has created a chilling mini-drama, which he then allows to dissolve into the next episode. In another section, titled "Song for St. George's Day," Ratmansky echoes the randomness and variety of daily life. Lots of stuff happens at once, scattered casually around the stage: a girl in yellow (the marvelously idiosyncratic Wendy Whelan) shakes her shoulders; a guy pivots on one bent leg; another mimics a whistle, echoing a glissando in the strings; someone lies down in the middle of the stage; a girl fixes her stocking. Then, just like that, two girls walk forward casually,

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bow and leave; two boys do the same; finally, the daydreamer gets up and walks off, taking the last girl with him. That's it; goodbye. But it's all a feint, and in the next section the dancers return as if nothing has happened.

Concerto DSCH, performed last year, is a high-spirited romp set to an exuberant Shostakovich piano concerto (No. 2, from 1957) with a rapturous slow movement. According to Whelan and Bouder, who were in the original cast, the ballet was made in less than three weeks, in a burst of creative energy. With the first jaunty notes on the bassoon, the dancers' windmill arms set them in motion as they run, spin, jump and lunge across the stage. "I like more plié," Ratmansky told me. "I like bigger steps and covering space and upper body answering the movement." This is a ballet about dynamism, speed and the sheer pleasure of movement. There is a small "team" of virtuosos in blue—a girl and two guys—who compete in feats of prowess until suddenly they tire and plop down to watch the others, legs bent, knees flopping open. As in *Russian Seasons*, he never lets us forget that his dancers are people as well. And like *Russian Seasons*, *DSCH* has a troubling heart. The second movement contains an unsettling pas de deux, in which a lanky girl in green (originally Whelan) and her partner struggle to find harmony, expressed mainly in slow, highly exposing lifts. But the synthesis does not hold, and the thwarted lovers exit in opposite directions. People loved these two ballets, and their enthusiasm grew when it was reported that Ratmansky was in negotiations with the New York City Ballet, which had recently lost its resident choreographer, Christopher Wheeldon. But the discussions broke down, probably because of the company's demands on his time, and a few weeks later it was announced that he would join ABT instead.

Concerto DSCH is a ballet about dynamism and the sheer pleasure of movement.

Ratmansky's first full-length ballet for ABT, *On the Dnieper*, is set to a score written by Prokofiev in 1931 for Serge Lifar, *premier danseur* and ballet master at the Paris Opera. Interestingly, he composed the music before he had a full scenario, which may account for its dramatic ambiguity. The music is beautiful—especially the string and woodwind prelude, reminiscent of *The Prodigal Son*—but lacks shape. The mood is unfailingly downbeat; it drifts from the dreamily melancholic to the ominous and then deepens into a dark, thickly orchestrated theme that returns at the end under very different circumstances. The setting reflects this murkiness; as the curtain rises it is already dusk, and half the ballet takes place under an inky black sky illuminated by an enormous moon. Moreover, the melodies and orchestration offer few clues to the characters' inner lives, except for a pretty flute melody for one of the protagonists that emphasizes the purity of her emotions and seems to foreshadow Prokofiev's Juliet. As Ratmansky admitted before the premiere, the music is a challenge: "I'm almost thinking I should have used another score, something easier to understand," he told me.

The story is deceptively simple. The central character, Sergei, is a soldier who returns to his village—on the River Dnieper, in Ukraine—and is pained to discover that he no longer loves his sweetheart, Natalia, and is instead drawn to the town beauty, Olga, who is engaged to another man. Natalia, who in the first cast was danced by the beautiful and deeply tragic Russian dancer Veronika Part, barely has time to rejoice at the return of her beloved Sergei—the music doesn't allow it. She is destined to be unhappy, though Ratmansky gives her some beautiful, delicate footwork and little swoons to illustrate her struggle. Olga, danced by Paloma Herrera, a bit of a powerhouse, has the sketchiest music and choreography; her part has few defining qualities, other than speed, skittishness (she tends to scamper around the other characters, except when she is in Sergei's arms) and a touch of flirtatiousness. The role of Sergei suits Gomes perfectly. Romantic, expansive, grounded and profoundly decent, he seems genuinely tormented by his predicament: "Why do I feel this way?" his body asks, as he leaps and falls and crouches and kneels on the ground. He is initially so deliriously happy to be home that he can't seem to stop turning and looking at everything; he whirls his arms and points at one thing and then another, then cups his hands as if to capture his world between them. But Sergei can't seem to fit back into the town's rhythms. He falls in and out of unison with the town boys, constantly distracted by Olga's presence. One can't help but think of the soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, who have become strangers to their families and can no longer remember who they were before they left.

But perhaps the biggest surprise of the ballet was Olga's fiancé, danced on the first night by David Hallberg. If the other characters are one-dimensional, he is even more so, yet Ratmansky gives him two of the ballet's most vivid moments. The first is toward the beginning of the betrothal party: he tries to draw Olga into a dance. He circles around her and touches her shoulders, but she moves away; then he tries to turn her toward him, but still she looks away. So he reaches his arm longingly across the front of her body and takes her hand and pulls her into a pas de deux, trying to compel her to dance with him through the sheer ardor of his love; she relents, but there is no joy in her. The spectacle of this forced duet, a foreshadowing of Juliet's with Paris in Prokofiev's 1935 ballet, is appalling. Then, at the end of the party, the fiancé stands alone in the center of the stage and explodes with frustration: he turns on his own axis and jumps with one long leg out to the side, then does a series of small leaps in a circle, jumps from side to side and hops backward, kicking one leg forward over and over. He swings his arms uncontrollably. He stares at the ground, then at the audience. The stage fills with his disappointment. "Why is this happening to me?" he is saying, and we feel it in our bones.

Ratmansky clearly saw a wildness in Hallberg—usually a gentle, noble dancer—that he wanted to set free, and did. Even if he had succeeded only in this—and *On the Dnieper* has much more to offer—it would have been enough to justify his new position at ABT. It is a company with fabulous dancers but without a unified artistic vision. Kevin McKenzie, the artistic director, knows this, and recognizes the enormous possibilities that come with Ratmansky's presence. "I hope he can be a beacon to help me spur and focus creativity within the ranks of ABT dancers," he told me. Ratmansky's contract is for five years, with the understanding that he will make one work for ABT each year, while at the same time pursuing his busy freelance career. Let's hope he's not too busy. His next ballet for the company (scheduled to premiere October 7) will be set to Scarlatti's keyboard sonatas, and given the musical selection, it will probably have no plot. He is also scheduled to make a new ballet for the New York City Ballet in the spring. He will spend more or less twenty weeks a year with ABT's dancers, dreaming up projects, perhaps staging some of his previous ballets (including, let's hope, *The Bright Stream* or *Flames of Paris*), maybe teaching company class from time to time. At least for now, ballet lovers can sleep a little bit more soundly. ■

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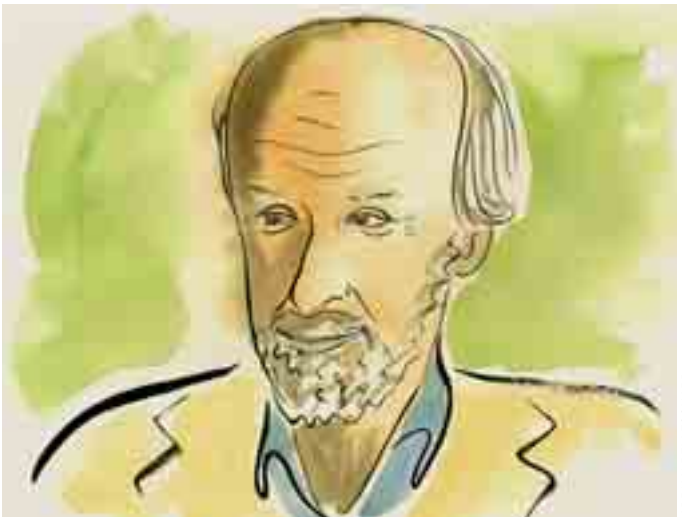
BACK TALK



ADRIAN BELLESGUARD

E.L. Doctorow

E.L. Doctorow's new novel, *Homer and Langley* (Random House; $26), imagines the lives of New York's famous Collyer brothers, prosperous eccentrics who dropped out of society and filled their town house with collections of obsolete, strange or otherwise broken-down objects. Doctorow's narrative extends into the late twentieth century, but the real-life Collyers were found dead in 1947, Langley felled by the traps he had laid for intruders and Homer, who is blind, a victim of starvation. —*Christine Smallwood*

What was your research process like?

I didn't do any research. I just used what I knew. I was a boy when they died: the whole house was discovered to be what it was, and it became instant folklore. Instant. And when my room was sloppy my mother would say, It's the Collyer brothers! I did look at photographs. I took the position that they were folklore, they were mythology, and that not research but interpretation was the proper response.

The Collyer brothers remind me a bit of *Grey Gardens*.

I never made that connection. I would make a distinction—the meaning I find is quite different. I just regard those women as kind of pathetic, dysfunctional messes. But I always had a feeling that these guys, there was a secret to them. Because they'd come from a well-to-do background and opted out. That was the essential idea in my mind. Go in the house, close the door, pull down the shutters, isolate yourself from the surrounding world. It was a kind of emigration. They were leaving the country. I regarded the book as a form of breaking and entering. They lived in their imaginations.

It's also a novel about stuff.

Accounts have called them pack rats. I think that's a demeaning, inadequate phrase. What they are is aggregators. The things they bring into the house—there's a history there of the things we've thought we needed over time. At this point I think the book becomes imponderable. You can say it's about inevitable human isolation. You can say it's about entropy. You can say it's about the end of an empire. I tend to agree with any reasonable interpretation. Anyway, all of us feel we need an awful lot. And the technology keeps changing, but the minute any technology appears it becomes indispensable.

Do you have any thoughts about the Kindle or e-readers?

I don't use one. I can understand why if you're on an airplane going around the world, you'd want a Kindle. But I think books are great technology. Once they're produced they don't use any energy. If their materials are decent and sound, and you take care of them, they'll last forever. I like the feel of a book, I like to turn pages, I like to see print on paper. The pleasure of going into a bookshop, finding things you didn't even know you were looking for, discovering things—that's what we're losing now. Everyone knows in advance what they want, and they order it online or download it.

Homer and Langley seem particularly "New York."

Yes. You can see a lot of them on the street, even today. That's why it wasn't the fact that they collected things that got me going but who they were, the metaphors they created in my mind. They're people who opted out. One of my friends found a comparison with Melville's story "Bartleby, the Scrivener." That withdrawal. Yes, it's New York, but it's also American. The Beats, that was a form of withdrawal. I wrote a story years ago about a fellow, an eccentric up in Westchester County called the Leather Man. He was all dressed in animal skins and plates of leather and a big leather hat, like a Viking. He carried a staff, and he lived wandering through the woods. People would give him food. He was totally benign but shy. He lived as a wandering hermit.

Yet Homer and Langley don't travel light. What kind of opting-out is it to take the world into your home like a museum?

Making another world, pulling the world in after you. But it's a different world: a symbolic world, a doomed world. They are premature archaeologists. The novel is really anything but a psychological study of dysfunction. They're engaged in trying to create meaning for themselves and a life that makes sense to them. They have convictions. There are two images that I like from the book. One is when they're tied to the chair back-to-back in the kitchen, and Langley delivers a speech about this ideal community. The other is when they're riding a bicycle built for two down the street. The price of writing things is, you're the instant reader, and you make these discoveries—they're coming through your fingers as you're typing; you don't think of them as mental operations. Then you read what you've written, and you laugh.

What are you reading now?

I've been rereading Chekhov, some new translations of the great novellas.

What are you learning from Chekhov?

I don't know if I can learn anything from Chekhov. He's such a surpassing genius. You can figure out how a book works, break it down into its parts. But it's almost impossible with Chekhov. He splashes the words out on the page, in a seemingly artless fashion, with no particular aesthetic principle or interest in the craft. How does he write paragraphs? You don't get any sense of aesthetic organization. Time passes, people complain, nothing happens, something happens—it just sort of spreads out. Of course, there's great art in that seeming artlessness—this could happen then or five pages later; it doesn't really matter. So you can't learn from that. You just are in awe. ■

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PRIVATE COLLECTION, COURTESY ESTATE OF JACK TWORKOV

House of the Sun (1952), by Jack Tworkov

Fever Charts

by BARRY SCHWABSKY

Almost any fable of the artist's life could take its title from the novel about the life that Balzac wrote, and that stands as a model for the rest: *Lost Illusions*. Yet Balzac may have been too optimistic. Showing his would-be poet Lucien Chardon seduced by his social ambitions and undefended by any strength of character, a man who throws away his talent by selling out, Balzac implicitly defends those who labor with integrity as heirs to greatness—and its rewards. So we all hope. But experience teaches that greatness is rare, and perhaps no less so among the upright than among those of questionable character. A sadder novel than Balzac's could have been written about the lost illusions of those who with patience and determination remain true to their intuition of the artistic absolute yet never attain inner certainty of their achievement or even scant public acclaim for it. But how much recognition would be enough anyway? In exchange for its near-extinction in the exigencies of form, the ego demands twofold repayment. The artist's demands on his public are typically as unappeasable as those he makes on himself. Although the pleasures of Jack Tworkov's writing are many, *The Extreme of the Middle* is a book I'd recommend to aspiring artists as a warning: this is how depressing it can be to be a serious, successful artist.

The Extreme of the Middle
Writings of Jack Tworkov.
Edited by Mira Schor.
Yale. 478 pp. $45.

I don't mean to nominate Tworkov as the hero of a neo-Balzacian novel in which the artist who stays true to his calling ends up a tragic failure. Nothing could be further from the case. Tworkov, one of the original Abstract Expressionists whose mark on the history of painting is inexpugnable, accomplished a great deal in a long and rich life, not only as an artist but as a teacher and a mensch. And his writings are a considerable contribution to the art history of his time. Their subject is not so much aesthetics or form as the ethics of art. But his was a life deeply shadowed by, among other things, his resentment at never having been accorded the worldly status of friends like Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline and Mark Rothko. Repeated insinuations that he'd been too heavily influenced by de Kooning particularly rankled, and were not always wrong.

He was born Yakov Tworkovsky in Biala, Poland, in 1900. It might have been said of Tworkov, when he arrived in New York in 1913, what he would later write in an essay on Chaim Soutine: the journey he made, "from the mediaeval Lithuanian ghetto village to Paris, has to be measured not only in hundreds of miles but also in hundreds of years." Yet more than a journey in space or in time, it was the immeasurable journey from a culture that disregarded the image to one in which the art of painting had a noble history and also, perhaps, a great future. But much had to be sacrificed for that journey to be undertaken. Tworkov speaks from the heart when, comparing Soutine with one of his predecessors, he says, "I envy Cézanne living out his manhood in the same village where he was born.... I am sorry for Soutine living in a foreign land. He could never exorcise the terrors of his childhood, and so they possessed him all his life."

As for his own hometown, Tworkov never did see it again. In one peculiar way, though, it always stayed with him, as the adopted name of his younger sister, who was the first to encourage him in his art and who herself became a painter of considerable stature. Unlike her brother, Janice Biala spent much of her life in Europe, first as the companion of the writer Ford Madox Ford from 1930 until his death in 1939, and then again after the war. Despite the long periods of separation, it is clear from his letters that Tworkov remained devoted to her to the end of his life, and that she and her husband, the painter Daniel Brustlein (whose illustrations for *The New Yorker* were signed Alain, the name by which Tworkov always addresses him), were his most trusted confidants—with the possible exception, it seems, of Ilya and Resia Schor, New York artists now little remembered except among connoisseurs of Judaica, and the parents of this book's editor, Mira Schor. On Ilya's death, Tworkov said, "I had told Mira long ago that she had better adopt me as an uncle since I had already adopted her father as my brother." Her long and sensitive Introduction repays any avuncular debt.

A sense of being hobbled by some inborn weakness rarely seems to have left Tworkov

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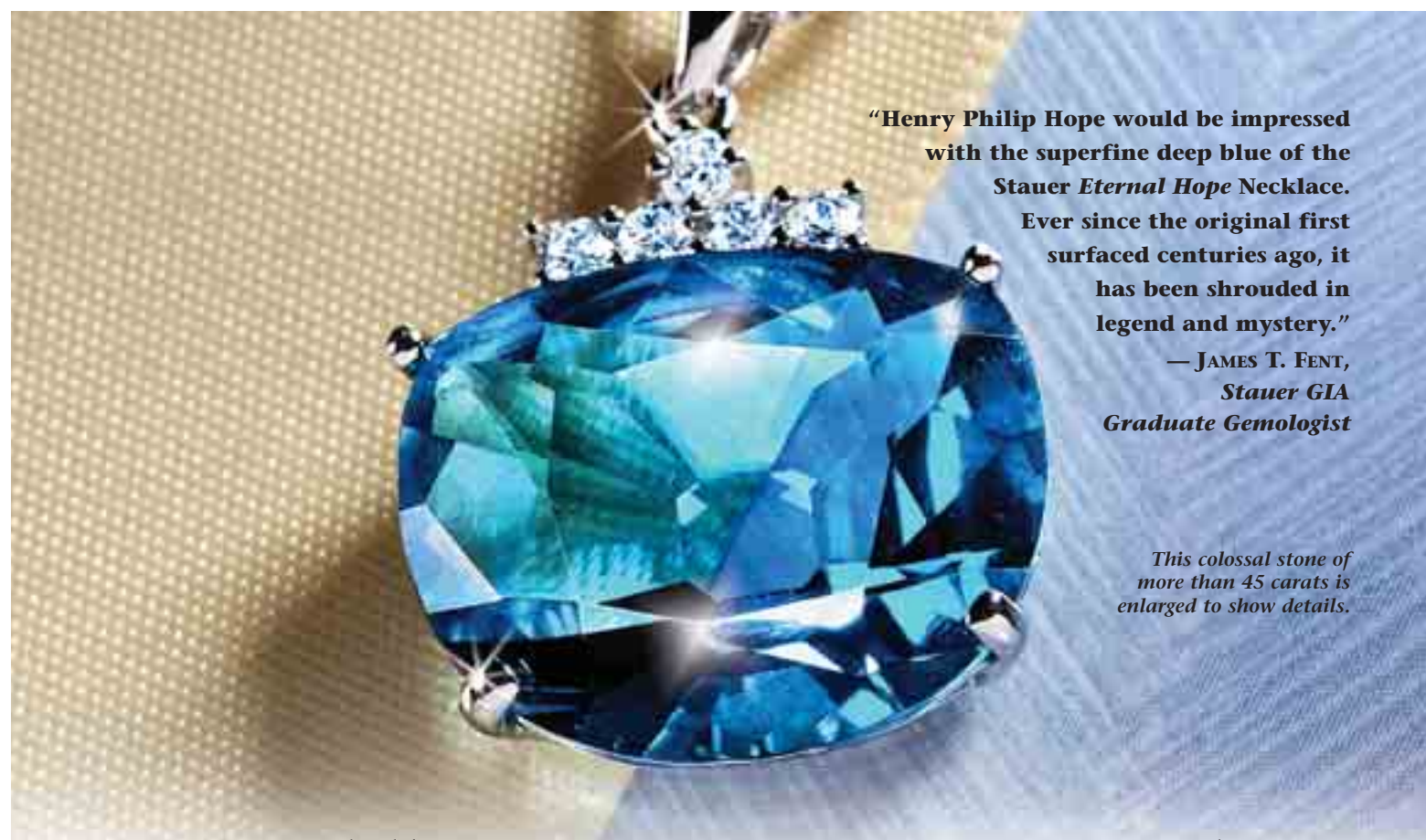

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for long. He constantly reflects on his neuroses, his diffidence, his social anxiety—which honestly never seem anything beyond the norm, but then what could be more neurotic than believing you're more neurotic than you really are? Of course, it's possible that the artist's journals are misleadingly one-sided, as he himself felt on rereading some of them in 1955 when he remarked, "They are like fever charts. I almost never write when I feel normal." Fair enough; he was not a writer by profession. But with well over 400 densely packed pages of journals, diaries and letters as well as published writings and lecture notes, the heft of this collection suggests that the painter felt abnormal often enough. Schor does not indicate what percentage of his private writings are represented here, but her statement that Tworkov "wrote incessantly, compulsively" suggests there could be much more; at minimum, she has not included a small book written in 1935–36 but then abandoned, *Social Meaning of Art*, described by the curator of Tworkov's posthumous 1987 retrospective at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts as "a fifty-page typed and edited manuscript."

It would be interesting to know if the typescript illuminates Tworkov's political views at the time. Later these would be deeply entwined with his sense of malaise. A Jewish immigrant intellectual in New York City in the '30s was a natural socialist. The fact that Tworkov had collaborated with John Dos Passos at the New Playwrights' Theatre in the late '20s gives some indication of his radical sympathies at the time. The earliest writings included in *The Extreme of the Middle* are letters to the artist's wife, Wally, composed during brief separations in 1936 and 1937. In them, demonstrations and union meetings are as important as high culture; the word "comrade" is a normal part of his vocabulary; he writes as an artist and an activist. So it comes as something of a surprise that when Tworkov's writings recommence ten years later, his attitude toward politics is very different: disillusioned to the point of pessimism. "The left in American letters, art, and politics," he advises his daughter Hermine, a college freshman, in 1958, "has become a cesspool of bad and stagnant thinking." It is a point he returns to again and again: revolutionary movements are merely symptoms of the sickness and rot of the civilization they pretend to oppose.

Between 1937 and 1947 something happened to profoundly shake Tworkov's faith in political action generally. Nothing in this book gives the reader any glimpse into what occurred—and yet the depth of his disgust, and the consistency and vehemence with which he expresses it, suggest that there must have been some definite event, or perhaps a series of them, rather than a gradual drifting away. But what distinguishes Tworkov from so many others—his erstwhile comrade Dos Passos, for instance—is that his loss of faith in the left did not lead him to the right. When asked at a public forum in 1960 what he considered to be the most important cultural activity in America, he answered "the Negro sit-downs in the South." Though professing himself "emotionally sad but placid" about the Vietnam War, he supported Eugene McCarthy for president and felt that "under Reagan it's America that has become the greatest danger to the world, not even less than what Hitler was." One of his last diary entries, seven months before his death from cancer in 1982, notes a meeting "to organize a committee to organize visual artists against nuclear armaments."

Tworkov had not renounced his ideals. But he had lost hope in the fight for them, and this loss was directly related to his ongoing sense of unease with himself and others. "Revolution of whatever kind," he felt, "leads to authoritarianism, to suppression, to dictatorship. Inevitably everyone must serve the revolution or be regarded as its enemy—thus no one can speak, reason, think or paint who does not directly serve the revolution…. The word has come to fill me with disgust." Tworkov's tone in this letter to his sister and brother-in-law, its personal yet categorical note, suggests that he'd met revolutionary demagoguery in person and felt in it a threat to his very existence as an artist. In any case—as this book's rather unattractive title, taken from one of the artist's journal entries, suggests—Tworkov was allergic to any form of extremism or intellectual absolutism. Thus his animosity toward Ad Reinhardt, whose pose of sublime certainty and exclusive possession of the truth must have been infuriating; Reinhardt's statement "Art is art. Everything else is everything else" seemed to leave all his colleagues on the side of everything else. "He thinks that there is a kind of Chinese wall between experience and painting," Tworkov complained publicly in Reinhardt's presence; in his private notes he added, "It is obnoxious to take a position that leaves you the only artist around." All the more so since, as Tworkov had declared years before, "No artist is by himself an artist. He is an artist only by virtue of the fact that he voluntarily permits other artists to act on him and that he has the capacity to react in turn…. There could no more be one artist than there could be one human being."

More broadly, Tworkov was repulsed by all self-conscious avant-gardism as well as the cult of genius or any insinuation that art might somehow be beyond good and evil. In his eyes, revolutionary politics and the nihilism of an all-consuming aesthetic mirror each other: "Pure esthetics, like pure sociologies (Utopias) lead to pure (without guilt) murder." "Picasso is the first of the modern artists who treated art neither like one treats a beloved or a mother who nourishes, but like a land to be conquered even if it had to be burned or destroyed. He prefigures the ruthless dictator." Both exemplify the "aristocratic pretensions"

Narragansett

The complete sentence narrates a satisfying process.
It closes and opens like a clam.
I take a knife to the sentence and start my evening at the raw bar.
It is hard work, and the sentences would prefer to be in the ocean.
I would rather be a patron of this establishment.
Someone over my shoulder
Would rather know I am going to continue to put up with his stuff.
It is not a wide receiver, his stuff. It is his development,
Which is gradual. It involves testing me. Sometimes
These tests take the form of imperatives. Drive onto the boat!
The boat would rather be en route to Maine.
It is an ambitious ferry. My knife wishes to whittle patterns
Into the enormous picnic table. Art does not narrate.

JORDAN DAVIS

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of all who claim "the autonomous character of the individual who is a law to himself." For this reason, Tworkov felt sure that the extreme avant-gardes, clinging to aristocratic values against the bourgeoisie, were actually reactionary and antimodern.

What's curious is that despite his professions of anti-avant-gardism and anti-extremism, Tworkov was extremely attracted to certain grandees of the avant-garde of his time—most notably, John Cage, "one of the most intelligent people I have ever met." Perhaps it was the composer's ability to embody a nonviolent, playful avant-gardism that beguiled Tworkov, although he shrewdly remarks that while "Cage associates himself with Zen and the absence of ego…an egoless Cage is unthinkable to me." Despite his ostensible quietism, "in a conversation Cage uses you as if you were an instrument from which to fetch a sound." In the end, Tworkov classified Cage's work as farce.

Tworkov was equally attracted to two younger painters who were close to and much influenced by Cage, Robert Rauschenberg (whom he met during a brief stint teaching at Black Mountain College in 1952) and Jasper Johns. He even bought a small, early flag painting from Johns, but he never really warmed to the work of either of them. Johns's flag "was a subject that posed a paradox: Was it an object? Was it a painting? The paradox is literature. As such it was interesting but soon exhausted." (Around 1961–62, Tworkov would paint his own variations on the American flag, retaining its colors while, in contrast to Johns, distorting its composition—"perhaps unconsciously an ironic comment," he mused, on his own "growing patriotism.") Rejecting avant-gardist pretensions to operate in what Rauschenberg famously called "the gap between art and life," let alone to heal that breach, Tworkov was even more disdainful of Modernist claims to strict aesthetic autonomy as articulated by Reinhardt or by Clement Greenberg. On the other hand, as an abstractionist he refrained from an art that approached reality as something to be represented. True, his first abstract paintings, in the early '50s, had been full of figurative reminiscences, but from the middle of that decade on he tried to eliminate them—not always successfully in his eyes, since even as late as 1963 he was still telling himself, "I've never quite been able to shake off figurative elements, but I must."

Still, he never ceased to envy representational painters from afar. In part this is accounted for by his intense admiration for his sister and her husband, both of whom pursued a modern form of stylized representation in the École de Paris tradition. He seems always to have wondered if he'd made a mistake but was convinced—in contradiction to Greenberg's view that Modernism was essentially a distillation of what made for quality in the painting of any time—that between abstraction and representation he had crossed a radical divide. He even speaks of being "trapped" in abstraction. Recalling to Alain the exaltation he'd felt in the Prado, he had to admit, "I cannot associate my experience in front of these paintings with what engages me in the studio." Seeing the work of younger representational painters, he remarked, "I shared not one thing with them except canvas, brushes and paint and the desire all artists have to fill their lives with something meaningful." In both spirit and technique, they might as well have been practicing different arts altogether. (A survey of Tworkov's art, "Jack Tworkov: Against Extremes—Five Decades of Painting," is on offer at the UBS Art Gallery in New York City, through October 27.)

Perhaps this is why, as critical as Tworkov could be of his colleagues among the Abstract Expressionists, he had to be acutely skeptical of succeeding generations of artists. Having with great difficulty and considerable regret made what he saw as a fundamental break with tradition, it must have been galling to find himself cast in the role of a traditionalist whose revolution had not been thorough-going enough after all. Having paid the price of that revolution, he must have thought the successive ones looked cheap and facile. It's a problem that the critic Leo Steinberg was talking about in the early '60s; although the article he devoted to it was called "Contemporary Art and the Plight of Its Public," he meant the plight of its makers just as much as of its viewers—that is, of the artists who might continually feel themselves in danger of being left behind. Steinberg evoked his own feeling on first encountering the work of Johns: "The pictures of de Kooning and Kline, it seemed to me, were suddenly tossed into one pot with Watteau and Rembrandt and Giotto." The reason, according to Steinberg, is that by comparison with Johns they all seemed equally "painters of illusion." A few years later, Johns was to be shown up as an illusionist by Donald Judd, and then Judd, a few years after that, by Mel Bochner. It was a period in which illusion was found to be bottomless, since more of it could always be discovered retroactively through a process of elimination. Steinberg goes on to report the responses to Johns of two unnamed Abstract Expressionists: "If this is painting, I might as well give up," said one;

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"Well, I am still involved with the dream," said the other. Both those painters could have been Jack Tworkov.

It's somewhat surprising that a man so prone to curmudgeonliness should have been a good teacher, but apparently Tworkov was, most notably at Yale, where he chaired the art department from 1963 through 1969. A journal entry deliberately paints his decision to accept the position in the worst possible light. He was driven, he accuses himself, by "hurt self-esteem. The attacks in the press on my status as a painter, my failure to win the support of any important writer, the lack of interest in my work by the leading museums, the narrowness of my circle of supporters, the failure of my exhibition…. The Yale job then seemed for the time being to salve some of my hurt." Needless to say, these are the worst possible reasons for becoming a teacher, though common enough.

Yet Tworkov thrived as a teacher because it appealed to his latent idealism. Years before, teaching one summer at Black Mountain, he had experienced something like the ideal anarchist community of which he'd secretly dreamed always: elders and youth, men and women working together in freedom and self-defined responsibility, without authority or hierarchy, squaring the circle of community and individualism that had always confounded him. "A bully could not exist here, everybody would allow that he has a right to be a bully, but no one would be bullied by him." One gathers that Tworkov would have liked to cultivate a similar ethos at Yale—the more fool he, albeit a holy fool. One can only wonder—from the perspective of today, when universities are assiduously burdening the world with a doctorate for artists—that in an "Annual Report for the Academic Year 1965–66" he raised the issue of abolishing the MFA in favor of "a school for advanced study where the student genuinely comes for just that and feels entirely responsible to himself"—no grades, no degree, just work for its own sake.

Tworkov had experienced something like this hoped-for community of individuals once before, in the early days of the Artists' Club, sometimes known as the Eighth Street Club or simply the Club, which (together with de Kooning and Kline, among others) he helped found in 1949. "I cannot remember any period in my life that so went to my head," he wrote. Here, everything was up for debate, and the sometimes pugnacious attitudes of the participants had a paradoxical effect: "The enthusiastic clash of ideas… destroys, or at least reduces the aggressiveness of all attitudes…. There is a strong sense of identification. I say to myself these are the people I love, that I love to be with…. How dull people are elsewhere by comparison." It wasn't to last. One of the saddest things about Tworkov's diaries, as he grows older, is his growing distance from the artists with whom he shared those years, the sense that these massive egos (his own no less than the others, despite his veneer of gentility) could no longer share the same space.

For Tworkov, painting was the cipher of this ideal community he had briefly glimpsed but could never hold on to. His life story was filled with episodes of failed identification. First came the loss of his home in Poland, though it had offered not even the protective warmth of the *shtetl* as he imagined Soutine had known it; because Tworkov's father was a tailor serving the officers of a Russian army regiment, the family lived in the gentile part of town: "I don't remember being at ease in either the Jewish or non-Jewish sections," he recalled. Then there was the comradeship of the '20s and '30s, including a stint on the WPA Federal Art Project, when he believed he could assert political agency as part of a larger social movement; and the Club, where a movement of artists "as fruitful and revolutionary as the Impressionism of 1870" was heralded. Both finally left him more isolated than before. The only freedom he'd discovered was one not worth finding, as he wrote the year before his death, the freedom "to be spiritually homeless."

When Tworkov was in his late 60s his art began to undergo a change nearly as drastic as the one that had happened some twenty years before, when he'd worked his way toward abstraction. Eschewing the impulsive gesture of Abstract Expressionism as he'd earlier eschewed the recognizable image, he introduced a geometrical armature on which to hang a dense field of smaller, less dramatic marks. In his essay on Soutine, who, as Tworkov asserted, seemed on the surface to be more of a traditionalist than he really was, he spoke of how his predecessor had managed "to liquefy the building blocks of Cézanne's art" to create "an art of movement" with "temporal overtones." This is not a bad description of what Tworkov himself would go on to do in his late work, which is when, I would argue, he finally came into his own as an artist. He uses his geometrical substrate for the same reason that Soutine used the simple everyday things he painted, to set "free his energies for a full and uninterrupted flow into his painting," such that the entire temporal process of its making becomes evident. It's one way to paint one's time, after some of its illusions have passed. ■

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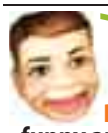

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A NEW *NATION* UTAH YAHOO GROUP has been created at groups.yahoo.com/group/thenationutah. To join, contact Sam Evans, (801) 791-8089 or sameritech@yahoo.com.

A NEW MADISON (WIS.) *NATION* DISCUSSION GROUP will be meeting one Sunday afternoon a month. Interested in participating? Contact Helen Aarli, h.aarli@earthlink.net or (608) 244-0787.

BOSTON AREA. *Nation* discussion group seeks new members! Please contact Sam Pilato, sam@alcove.arlington.ma.us, (781) 643-0038.

THE CHICAGO *NATION* DISCUSSION GROUP, which began three years ago, is looking for new members. Monthly meeting. For information, call June at (312) 670-0966 in the evenings.

ROCK HILL/FORT MILL, SC, *Nation* discussion group forming. Contact addgroup@comporium.net.

SANTA CLARA COUNTY, CALIF., *Nation* discussion group meetings are starting up. First meeting date: February 10. E-mail loisaalbq@yahoo.com.

PSYCHOTHERAPY

CHICAGO PSYCHOTHERAPIST, twenty-five years, all issues including depression, anxiety, relationships, creative blocks. Sliding scale, insurance. Deborah Hellerstein, PhD, (312) 409-9516. therapyinchicago.com.

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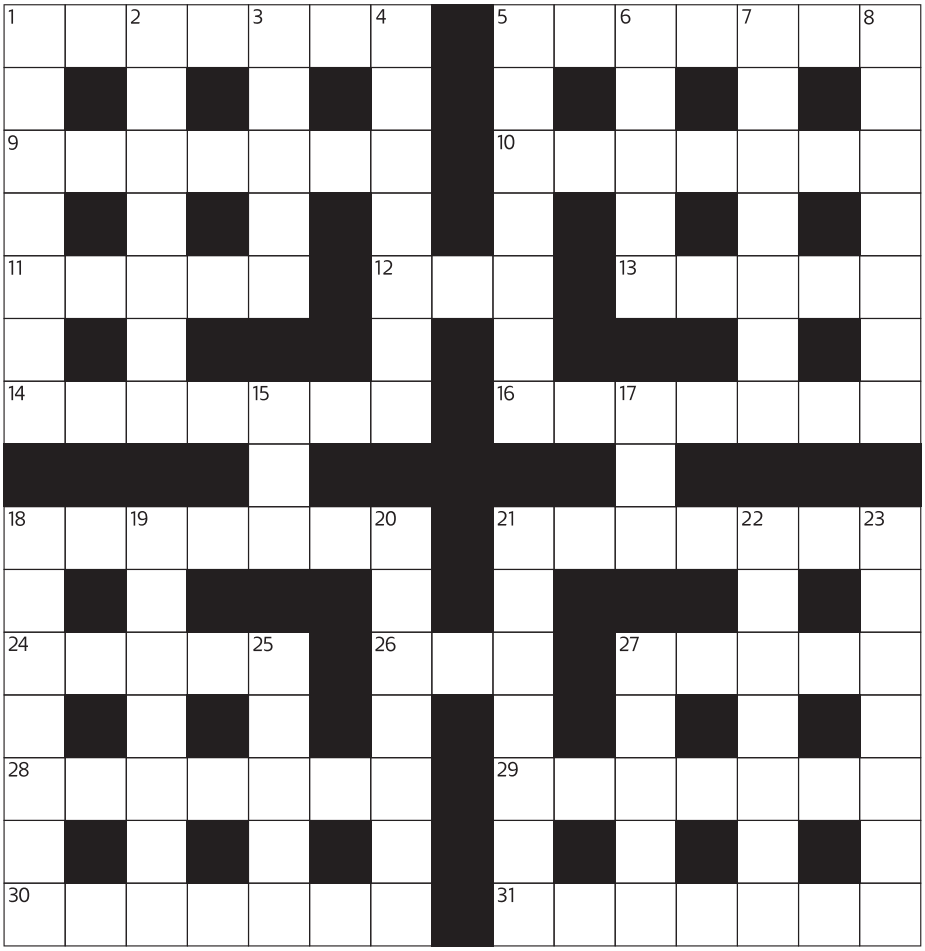
Puzzle No. 3186

FRANK W. LEWIS



ACROSS

1 A playboy of this world finds a sweet, dizzy registered nurse, a short one! (7)

5 Our former president, in short, dined on a primary color, as silk might be, or livestock. (7)

9 Little devil in a little fish! But it could keep you off-kilter. (7)

10 Blossom and more! Three's around four if you miss the point. (7)

11, 12 and **13** Fire the mechanism, or go all out? (5,3,5)

14 No toll here! A wee fry, stirred, makes it perfect. (7)

16 Hates the exams, I hear. (7)

18 What the mechanic does to the car could mean a certain fellow has reached the top of the beanstalk! (5,2)

21 Walking along to add a heavy weight here to name a London station. (7)

24 Confused stare makes these of interest. (5)

26 Boss! The number comes before an exclamation of pain. (3)

27 The angel does this for show, and reverses. (5)

28 Birds of a feather? 11 is stirred with Royal Crown shortly to produce it. (7)

29 Change of direction—or directions? Either way, it will be way different! (7)

30 People having a row? It's just the same old crew. (7)

31 Suffering an eclipse, sundry northeast steamships briefly find arid conditions. (7)

DOWN

1 and **18** They were famous tumblers. (5,2,7)

2 You? Me? Him? Her? (7)

3 Force 2 to leave, and bad vice will end up at the crossroads. (5)

4 It's regular after dark, but it sounds more like King Arthur's round table! (7)

5 When you're at this, you've had it up to here and don't know what to do or which way to turn—but it sounds like you've lost your sense of humor! (4,3)

6 It's a toss-up—lose on purpose or pitch it? (5)

7 Idolizes the silversmith and his family? (7)

8 Crazy Theodore's sister, commonly, stops—just ceases… (7)

15 and **17** …while little Theodore existed, switched, and got thinner and thinner until he almost disappeared! (6)

18 see 1

19 The 6 stops here, but he's part of the nine, with Tom dear in Paris. (7)

20 Choose Junior! If one does this to others, it is bullying. (5,2)

21 The prisoner of war has a point—communist!—and has specified fuel. (7)

22 Uncle, I'd badly gather relevant parts to comprise. (7)

23 Gee, I hear escorts showing those who exclaim fulsomely, or just "Well, well, well." (7)

25 Beat it! State animal! (5)

27 Blue? Goose? Straw? Rasp? Chuck? (5)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3185

R	E	L	A	T	I	V	E		H	A	N	D	L	E
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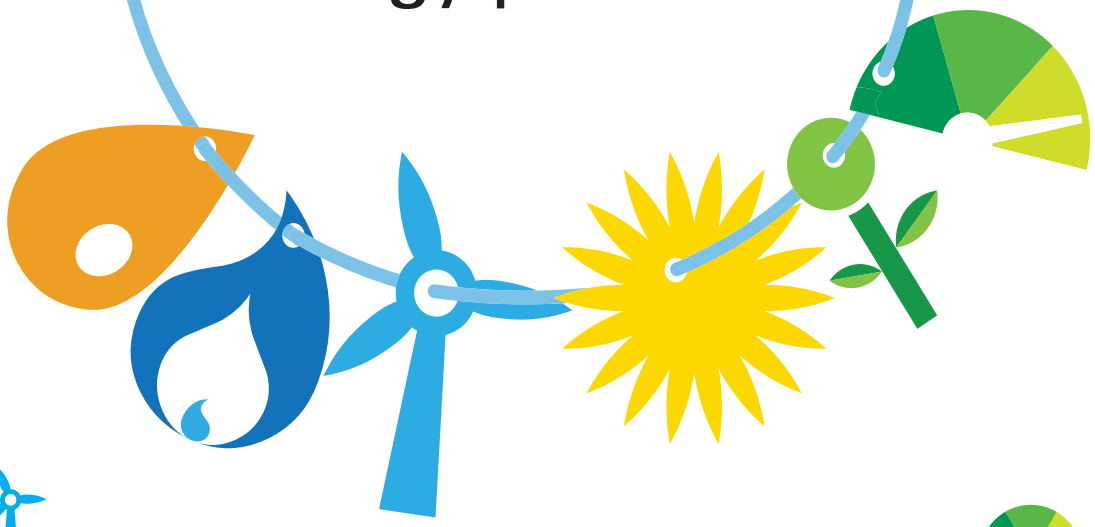

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